

(MAXINE hurries in, wearing gloves. TONY closes the front door.)

(MAXINE hugs MARGOT. MARGOT's hands hover, unable to embrace MAXINE. MAXINE senses her resistance.)

MAXINE. Did he hurt you?

TONY. Just some bruising. On her throat.

(MARGOT hesitates, then loosens her turtleneck to reveal the purple bruises.)

MAXINE. Jesus.

(MAXINE makes a move towards MARGOT, but MARGOT pulls away. MAXINE, stung and confused, removes her gloves and sets them on the table.)

Why didn't you tell me what happened?

TONY. Look, I / know -

MAXINE. / When they said it was a minor emergency, I figured it was something like a bathtub leak. Reading it in the papers this morning -

TONY. Yes, sorry, I should have phoned your hotel, but the police kept us rather busy last night. They didn't leave until past three. Would you like coffee? I can make some.

MAXINE. No. Thanks.

TONY. I'd, erm, best change. Keep Margot company, would you?

(TONY exits to the bedroom, closes the door.)

MAXINE. What's the matter?

START



MARGOT. Didn't you hear? I stuck a pair of scissors into a man last night. I'm a murderer now.

MAXINE. No, you're not. You defended yourself.

MARGOT. I did. Yes.

MAXINE. I'm proud of you.

MARGOT. Are you?

MAXINE. Of course I am. If you hadn't done what you did... The papers say it was a burglary.

MARGOT. Do they?

MAXINE. Well, isn't that what it was?

MARGOT. That's not what *he* said.

MAXINE. Who?

MARGOT. The man who attacked me.

MAXINE. ...He spoke to you?

MARGOT. Oh, yes.

MAXINE. What did he say?

MARGOT. He said... He said he'd been paid five thousand pounds to murder me.

MAXINE. What?

MARGOT. (*Nods.*) He said: "I've got my money. *Your* money, actually."

MAXINE. (*Putting it together.*) The five thousand pounds you paid for the letter?

MARGOT. (*Nods.*) He called it a neat trick, getting a person to pay for her own murder.

MAXINE. Who did he say sent him?

MARGOT. We never got that far. I was wondering if it might have been you.

MAXINE. I'm sorry?

MARGOT. I said you could have written those blackmail notes, and when you got the money, you could've used it to pay him to kill me.

MAXINE. Just why should I do that?

MARGOT. Revenge. For my breaking things off. It is one of your five reasons, isn't it? Revenge? And it's the sort of thing you think up, plotting how to murder people, working it out. He said the murder was planned, it was planned to take place at precisely ten after eight. It had to take place precisely then because the alibi was the radio.

MAXINE. Why would his alibi be the radio?

MARGOT. That's what I couldn't figure. But then I'm stupid. He didn't say it was *his* alibi. He said it was *the* alibi. It didn't hit me until I realized I could hear your voice. I'd tuned in just as I said I would. He had to kill me at that moment precisely because that was when you were on the talks program. An alibi of three million listeners.

MAXINE. Margot, / this -

MARGOT. / Then I thought about your letter that I couldn't destroy. It was so passionate, uncharacteristically so. I started to wonder if you'd written about us that way for a reason: so the letter couldn't help but be read as incriminating. No one reading a letter like that could think our friendship was innocent, not after you'd described it that way. It would be unmistakable that we'd been lovers. I'd have no choice but to buy it back, a boringly conventional woman like me, so fearful of scandal. You were right, five thousand pounds didn't make much of a difference to me. But it could make quite a difference to a struggling writer living in a sixth floor walkup.

(Pause.)

MAXINE. Just so I've got this straight: I wrote a love letter so I could blackmail you for five thousand pounds, then used that five thousand pounds to have you killed.

MARGOT. Does it work?

MAXINE. It's good. May I steal it?

MARGOT. It's all yours. Even...

(Laughs.)

...even the blackmail notes I showed to you, you actually managed to make me give them back to you.

MAXINE. "Back" to me? What, you think I did that to cover my tracks?

MARGOT. Where are they now?

MAXINE. At my hotel.

MARGOT. And probably hard to find.

MAXINE. Do you know how crazy you sound?

MARGOT. *(Explodes.)* I killed a man last night!

MAXINE. *(Beat; careful.)* I know. Didn't think you had it in you. I see now that you do. What did the police think when you told them this man said he'd been paid to kill you?

MARGOT. I didn't tell the police.

MAXINE. Why not?

MARGOT. Because if I told them that, I'd have to tell them the rest, about the money, the letter, us.

MAXINE. Did you tell Tony?

MARGOT. The only person I've told is you.

MAXINE. Why?

MARGOT. To see how you'd react.

MAXINE. Are you satisfied?

MARGOT. Not really.

← END

(We hear the front door buzzer.)

TONY. *(Offstage.)* Margot? Can you get it?

MARGOT. *(Calls.)* I'd rather not right now!

(TONY enters from the bedroom, dressed.)

TONY. ...I'll get it, then, shall I?

(TONY opens the front door.)

(INSPECTOR HUBBARD, in a raincoat, stands there.)

INSPECTOR HUBBARD. Mr. Wendice?

TONY. Yes.

INSPECTOR HUBBARD. My name's Hubbard. May I come in?

TONY. Yes, please.

(INSPECTOR HUBBARD enters. TONY closes the front door.)

INSPECTOR HUBBARD. Mrs. Wendice. I'm Chief Inspector Hubbard.

TONY. Erm, Inspector, this is Miss Hadley. A friend of ours.

INSPECTOR HUBBARD. *Maxine* Hadley. You and Mr. Wendice were together last evening.

MAXINE. Yes.

INSPECTOR HUBBARD. Why was that?

MAXINE. Why was what?

INSPECTOR HUBBARD. Why were the two of you together?