

Dial M for Murder (1954)

Alfred Hitchcock

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OVERVIEW

Director Sir Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) is a household name and perhaps the best-known British filmmaker. With over 50 films to his credit, Hitchcock helped to shape the modern understanding of the thriller genre. His best-known films include *The Birds*, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, and *Rear Window*, all of which have earned accolades, including preservation by the US Film Registry. In 1960, Hitchcock was inducted into the Hollywood Walk of Fame with two stars for his work in both film and television. He was also the first recipient of the BAFTA Academy Fellowship Award.

Film *Dial M for Murder* is based on a play of the same name written by Frederick Knott. The original play was broadcast on BBC Television in 1952. Originally planned to be released in dual-strip 3-D, this idea was scrapped because of issues installing and managing the complex projectors in theaters. *Dial M for Murder* is one of Hitchcock's better-known films, and frequent adaptations and homages have been made since its release. The film is frequently listed among the greatest films of all time, including a #9 place in the American Film Institute's Top 10 Mysteries.

Background *Dial M for Murder* marked the end of the partnership between Sidney Bernstein and Alfred Hitchcock. They had tried to establish their own production company in 1947, Transatlantic Pictures, but after frequent issues maintaining the rights to intellectual properties and funding, Hitchcock decided to part ways, continuing his work for Warner Bros. He had planned to produce a film based on the 1948 novel *The Bramble Bush*. Originally adapted for the stage in 1952, John Williams and Anthony Dawson reprised their Broadway roles in Hitchcock's production. *Dial M for Murder* was an instant hit, making \$6 million at the box office in 1954. It remains highly regarded today, with a recent review in the *Guardian* calling it "a taut, acidly funny thriller."

CINEMATIC NARRATION

Hitchcock seems to have learned from his last several films exactly what audiences expected from him, and he delivered it in *Dial M for Murder*. We see many long shots and artful lighting, but it's all used to create suspense instead of pure experimentation. He delivers a hauntingly beautiful murder scene just before the film's intermission: As gruesome as it is to watch Lesgate die, we feel instant relief for Margot and building suspense for Tony. How is he going to deal with the failure of his plot? This was a film that required very strong acting to sell the plot, and the cast delivered in scene after scene.

SYNOPSIS

Tony Wendice has been plotting the murder of his wife, Margot, since learning of her infidelity with an American writer, Mark Halliday. He's been waiting for the perfect stooge to kill her and uses Charlie Swann, an old schoolmate, providing himself with an alibi. It all seems like the perfect murder until Margot flips the script, killing Swann in self-defense. Tony returns home and doctors the crime scene before calling the police. Using a blackmail scheme he constructed earlier that year, Tony makes it look as though Swann was blackmailing his wife. This creates a possible motive for Margot to murder Swann.

The police pursue Margot as a murderer, building a solid case that convicts her. On the day of her sentencing, Chief Inspector Hubbard has her removed from prison and taken to her flat. There, she is

unable to unlock her front door. When Tony doctored the crime scene, he placed Swann's key in his wife's purse by mistake, the single fatal flaw in an otherwise perfect murder. Swann, in his panic after not hearing the phone ring at the arranged time, put Margot's key under the stair carpet as he tried to leave. In private with Mark and Margot, Hubbard reveals his idea: whoever knows where the key is hidden was the one who planned the murder. Later that day, having lost his key, Tony retrieves the key hidden by Swann beneath the carpet on the stairs and enters the home. There he finds Mark, Margot, and Hubbard waiting for him. Realizing he's caught, he admits to his part in the crime, sparing Margot a lifetime in prison.

CHARACTERS

Tony Wendice — A former tennis star who plots to kill his rich wife

Margot Mary Wendice — Tony's unfaithful wife

Mark Halliday — A New York-based television writer, Margot's paramour

Chief Inspector Hubbard — The lead detective investigating Margot's case

Charles Alexander Swann/Captain Lesgate — Tony's college chum who is roped into murder

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Tony Wendice

Tony is a former tennis star who quits the sport to become a salesman after learning that his wife, Margot, is unfaithful. Over a year, he plans a perfect murder, enlisting his former classmate, Swann, to kill Margot. When the perfect murder goes wrong, Tony changes tactics, turning the police's gaze upon Margot's apparent motive.

Intelligent Tony is scary smart. Instead of using his intellect for good, however, he seeks macabre revenge on his unfaithful wife, planning a 'perfect murder.' Despite his forethought and intelligence, he cannot account for everything, and the murder goes off with several hitches. Lesgate is killed by Margot's scissors, forgotten on the desk after a project Tony had suggested for Margot. Moments like these throughout the film show us that no man can foresee the future, no matter how smart he may be. Tony thinks quickly, manipulating the crime scene before the police arrive and feeding them convenient lies about Margot to assure her being tried for murder. Just like the scissors, Tony cannot foresee that Hubbard is waiting for him to use the hidden key at the film's end. His intellect causes him to simply give up: He's smart enough to know when he's been caught. He even returns Hubbard's latchkey, astutely guessing that the Inspector set him up by switching their identical overcoats.

Confident Tony is confident to a fault. He assumes that he can create the perfect murder, showing a clear lack of humility. His confidence allows him to alter the crime scene, but it begins slipping as the film continues. Through the film's second half, he begins drinking more and more after interactions with Hubbard or Mark. His confidence shows in his paying off debts with the money he was going to use to pay Swann, believing the financial activity cannot be traced back to him if he uses pre-circulated pound notes. Ultimately, his confidence is his undoing. Believing the police couldn't have discovered the hidden key, he uses it to enter his flat, springing Hubbard's final trap.

Calm While his calm begins to erode towards the film's end, Tony puts up a good front for Hubbard and Mark. He's able to maintain his cool when Margot survives the attempt on her life. Collected and organized, he docters the crime scene, making Lesgate look like the man who was blackmailing Margot by placing Mark's letter in his jacket pocket. He keeps calm, too, feeding believable lies to the police the entire time Margot is under suspicion, even lying about helping her cover up the murder. His calm demeanor never slips in front of Mark or Hubbard, even when he's caught using the hidden key. He calmly returns Hubbard's key and begins pouring a glass of scotch.

Margot Wendice

Margot is a rich married woman who falls for Mark. Her husband, Tony, enacts a plot to kill her for this, but she manages to kill her attacker. She becomes trapped in another of Tony's schemes when the police believe her attacker is the man who blackmailed her, giving her a motive for murder.

Trusting Margot is incredibly trusting. She doesn't even consider that Tony could be framing her until Mark and Hubbard spell out his plan to her at the end of the film. While she is trusting, she doesn't want to reveal her infidelity to her husband. Still, she trusts Mark with the details of her blackmail, going so far as to give him the blackmail letters. Margot comes to trust Hubbard and Mark easily at the film's end, standing by them while they wait to see if Tony knows where the hidden key is.

Unfaithful Margot's infidelity causes the film's main conflict. While Tony's murder plot isn't her fault, her inability to be honest with him about it does cause tension between them. She loves Mark wholeheartedly, considering leaving Tony for him. Margot's fear of exposure creates the opportunity for Tony to doctor the evidence, creating a strong case that she murdered Lesgate. By not telling anyone that she was blackmailed, she makes it easy for Tony to quickly alter his plan when she survives the murder attempt.

Mark Halliday

Mark is a television writer from New York. He falls in love with Margot during a vacation in London. A year later, he returns and becomes embroiled in the strange plot her husband, Tony, has planned for her, eventually becoming her only advocate.

Inquisitive Mark has an inquisitive mind. This shows in his occupation as a television writer, specializing in crime thrillers. Because of his inquisitive nature and writing experience, he can surmise just about what Tony did to frame Margot. Because he isn't a police officer, some information is beyond his reach, making his reconstruction of the crime imperfect. His inquisitive behavior shows in his passion for dissecting Tony's bank statements and his desire to prove that Margot is innocent.

Determined Mark is determined to protect Margot. Because of his love for her, Mark is the earliest proponent of Margot's defense. He practically begs Tony to tell the truth to the police, or at least make up a story that will save Margot from the noose. His determination continues to show when he reveals the case of money to Hubbard and pushes him to investigate the bank statements. Margot is drawn to Mark when his determination to prove her innocence becomes clear to her at the film's end. Beyond a personality trait, Mark's determination shows the depth of his love for Margot.

Inspector Hubbard

Inspector Hubbard is a crack detective working in London. He is assigned the lead role in investigating Margot's attempted murder and the manslaughter of Swann. Using wit and observation, he correctly finds the solution to Tony's attempt at a perfect murder.

Unconventional Hubbard's investigation techniques are occasionally strange. He resorts to trickery and thievery to prove his hypothesis that whoever knows the location of the hidden key is the one who committed the crime. He steals Margot's key from her handbag, finding that it doesn't fit her apartment door. Furthermore, he then finds that it fits one of Swann's lady friend's doors, entering her home and using her phone to call police headquarters about his discovery, a technical overstepping of police authority. Further, he uses the similarity of his and Tony's overcoats to plant his own key on Tony, forcing him to reveal whether he knows where the killer's key was hidden. This unconventional investigative technique shows us that sometimes small liberties with the law must be taken to reveal larger crimes, a common theme in Hitchcock's thrillers.

Wise Hubbard knows when to show his hand. He wisely determines when and how to reveal what he knows, keeping several characters in the dark as to his knowledge and motivations. Tony, despite being

one of Hubbard's prime suspects, comes to trust Hubbard who seemingly accepts his lies about Margot. Mark, however, comes to detest Hubbard for the same reasons. Mark changes his mind when it becomes clear that the detective has figured out Tony's plot, and hopes to clear Margot's name before she is executed. Through his wise judgment of the situation and persons involved, Hubbard comes up with the correct solution to the mystery.

THEMES

Appearance vs. Reality The entire plot of *Dial M for Murder* rests on this theme. Tony's plan to kill Margot and then his subsequent cover up after she unexpectedly survives are manipulations of appearance. He makes it seem like someone else is blackmailing Margot, using the evidence from this crime to blackmail Lesgate by asking him to handle the letter, and getting his fingerprints on it. Lesgate agrees to kill Margot, thereby giving Tony a perfect alibi. When Margot kills Lesgate, Tony deftly plants Mark's letter bearing Lesgate's fingerprints in Lesgate's coat pocket. This makes it appear to the police that Margot had a motive to kill Lesgate to avoid blackmail, building a strong but circumstantial case that eventually puts her on death row. When Tony is caught spending an inordinate amount of one-pound notes around town and paying off large debts, Inspector Hubbard begins zeroing in on Tony as a potential suspect. Mark comes to a similar conclusion, although he's missing one key clue: Margot's missing latchkey. Using the knowledge that only two people could have known the hidden location of the key on the night of the murder, Hubbard sets a trap for Tony. When Tony is caught, he knows he can't lie his way out of knowing where the key was hidden and gives up trying to appear innocent.

Investigation Investigation is a surprisingly small theme in this film, but important nonetheless. *Dial M for Murder* focuses mostly on Tony's crimes and subsequent cover-up, with the majority of the investigation happening off-screen. Inspector Hubbard does run us through his methods at the film's end, explaining that he had to utilize some unusual 'techniques' to prove his hypothesis. While traditional investigation leads him where Tony wants him to go, bending the rules a little allows him to catch Tony in a lie. By 'borrowing' Margot's key while visiting her in prison, Hubbard is able to confirm that she doesn't possess a key that can open her apartment door. This inspires him to search for a hidden key after finding that Margot's key opens the front door of one of Lesgate's paramours. Since they've proven that Lesgate entered through the front door and that he didn't have any keys in his pocket when he was found, he must have put the key back in its hiding place. Therefore, if Tony knows where the key is, he is the one who hired Lesgate to kill his wife. When he returns home and uses the key after the one Hubbard planted on him doesn't work, he retrieves and uses the hidden key, sealing his fate.

Crime Crime and criminality are large themes in *Dial M for Murder*. The focus of the majority of the film is on Tony's crimes. Not only does he attempt to blackmail Margot, he uses the letters as a way to blackmail Lesgate into doing the murder, a three-in-one crime combo. His crime spree continues unnoticed when he tampers with the crime scene, planting evidence on Lesgate and accidentally stealing his key and placing it in Margot's handbag. This simple mistake is his eventual undoing. Although Margot is awaiting execution, Hubbard gets his "blood up" about the case, taking matters into his own hands with some unusual investigation tactics. While waiting for Tony to return home after confirming that neither Mark nor Margot knew anything about the hidden key, he explains his plan, which Tony then executes in its entirety when he remembers the hiding place and retrieves the key. This proves he was the perpetrator all along.

Love Love is a minor theme in *Dial M for Murder*, revolving mostly around Mark and Margot's clandestine relationship. They truly seem to love one another, always gravitating towards each other. Mark is the only one Margot trusts to tell about the blackmail attempt, although Mark's misguided offer of the documents to the police accidentally backfires, giving Margot a potential motive for murder. He does this to try and protect her, a trait that continues throughout the rest of the film. When Margot is waiting for the hangman's noose, Mark is driven to near madness, confronting Tony about his possible connection with the crime and exploding with anxiety when Hubbard seems to accept Tony's lies about Margot's part in killing Swann. Reunited at the end of the film, Margot never leaves Mark's arms: hardship has brought them closer than ever.

Revenge We see revenge in this film in two major ways: a jealous Tony's plot to kill Margot, and his attempt to mislead the police, resulting in Margot being tried for murder. We've already discussed these in the previous themes, but it is important to remember that all of Tony's actions are driven by revenge. He is angry that his wife was unfaithful, but instead of risking losing his wealth by divorcing or killing her himself, he concocts a revenge scheme that will allow him to receive a large life insurance payoff, living off Margot's misfortune for the rest of his life. While his plot doesn't go to plan, Tony sees another opportunity to manipulate the evidence, making it look as if Margot killed Swann in cold blood and then she faked her strangling with her stocking, burning the scarf Swann used in the attempted murder. The jury buys this story, but Inspector Hubbard does not. In the end, Tony gives up, congratulating the detective when he catches Tony using the hidden key.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

How, in your opinion, does the use of long shots add to or detract from the storytelling in the film?

The themes of Love and Infidelity intermingle throughout this film. Discuss how these polarized themes play on one another.

Dial M for Murder is incredibly similar to many of Hitchcock's previous thrillers. What notable plot devices are utilized?

There is a notable experimental sequence portraying Margot's trial. How effective was this scene?

In what ways is *Dial M for Murder* like a stage play?

SCENES

61a- A policeman walks his beat outside a block of flats while jaunty music plays. He pauses for a moment to watch something in the distance before walking out of shot. The camera moves closer to the door of the building designated 61a. The scene fades as the camera appears inside the flat. A man kisses a woman seated at a breakfast table before joining her. He sorts through the mail while the woman reads her paper. Her eyes dart up toward her husband hesitantly before they snap back down focusing on the paper. "Queen Mary Arrives Today," a headline says. The scene fades once more before the Queen Mary can be seen pulling into port. Among the constant flow of disembarking passengers, the camera finds a sharply dressed man who grins to himself.



"Before Tony comes"- Back at the apartment, the blonde woman kisses the man from the boat passionately while romantic music swells. She then offers to make him a drink, crossing the room. "Mark," she says from the bar, "before Tony comes I ought to explain something... I haven't told him anything about us." "That's not surprising," Mark replies, "it's a tough thing to do." He tries to joke with her about how her lie could fit into one of his crime stories, but she doesn't find it funny. "Tony's changed... he decided to give up tennis and settle down to a job... Just like that." "I suppose that's when you stopped writing me," Mark says wistfully. The woman reacts sadly. "Margot," Mark asks, "is it?" Margot says she burnt all the letters Mark had sent her after she read them, all but one.



Blackmail- Margot says she kept the letter in her purse and that it went missing one day when her purse was stolen at Victoria station. Mark is worried, asking if she ever found it. "I recovered the handbag two weeks later from the lost and found," says Margot, "but the letter wasn't there." She describes the blackmail letter she received a week later, detailing what she had to do to get her letter back: "I was to draw fifty pounds from my bank in five-pound notes and then change them for used one-pound notes." Mark asks if she still has the letter, and she stands to retrieve it. Mark looks it over and finds it to be virtually untraceable. Margot says that she checked on the address she was supposed to mail the money, finding only a mail-forwarding service.



“One thing you haven’t explained”- “I can’t understand why you didn’t tell me,” Mark says after asking to hold onto the blackmail notes. “You probably would’ve made me go to the police,” Margot says. “As it was only fifty pounds, I thought I’d pay up and have done with it.” Mark tells Margot that she’d best tell her husband, Tony. Margot tries to change the subject, talking about the last time they saw each other a year before. Mark joins her in reminiscing: “We were in the kitchen. I nearly said, ‘I can’t go through with this. Let’s find Tony and tell him all about it.’” He comments that it’s going to be a difficult evening before asking a question: “Why didn’t you burn that letter too?” Margot moves to embrace Mark while romantic music begins to play.



Small talk- The door to the building opens, and the camera snaps to a view of the flat's front door. Margot and Mark’s shadows part quickly before the door lock clicks and Tony walks in. “There you are!” Margot says excitedly. “We thought’ you were never coming.” “I’m sorry,” Tony says, kissing his wife, “but the boss blew in just as I was leaving.” Margot introduces Tony to Mark, and they begin a rather typical conversation over drinks about work and Mark’s plans for his trip to London. Margot says that they’d better head to the theater, but Tony regretfully reports that he has to stay home and work, offering his ticket to Mark to scalp outside the theater to “pay for drinks” after inviting him to a stag party the next night. Then, Margot and Mark leave in a hurry, eager to get to the theater.



Phone call- Tony’s face becomes serious when he locks the door. After closing the curtains, he sits at the desk by the garden windows, pulling a scrap of paper from his pocket before dialing a phone number. “Can I speak to Captain Lesgate, please?” Tony asks when someone picks up. It appears to be Lesgate, as Tony continues speaking, asking about a car for sale. He manages to convince the man to meet him later that evening to discuss the sale of the car over drinks, hoping to talk the price down. After hanging up, Tony crosses the room to a chair where he pulls a pair of white gloves from a paper bag, laying them gently on the back of the sofa before the scene fades to black.



Visitor- Sometime later, Tony stands by the door. He plays with a cane, practicing using it since he told Lesgate over the phone that he'd injured his knee. He moves to look out the front window from his bedroom when he jolts to a stop: The street door bangs closed. Tony doubles back and grabs the cane before opening the door when the buzzer rings. A man with a large mustache stands outside. "Mr. Fisher?" he asks Tony. "Yes," Tony replies. "Captain Lesgate?" After confirming his identity, Tony invites the man in, making some small talk while taking his coat.



College memories- "You know," says Lesgate, "I can't help thinking I've seen you before." "It's funny you should mention that," Tony says with a familiar tone. "The moment I opened the door, I... Wait a minute... You're not Lesgate... C.J. Swann. Or was it C.A.?" "Well, you've got a better memory than I have," Lesgate replies. "When did we meet?" Tony tells him that they'd both attended Cambridge about twenty years before, although he was an underclassman. They decide to have a drink to celebrate when Lesgate asks Tony how he knew his car was for sale. While Tony has several explanations lined up, Lesgate doesn't believe them. When they sit down for drinks, Lesgate remembers that he's seen Tony's picture in the papers from when he was in Wimbledon. They share a few college memories while drinking their brandy.



Marital troubles- "What are you doing nowadays?" Tony asks. Lesgate says he deals in real estate before asking Tony the same question, learning that he works as a sports equipment salesman. When Lesgate notices Tony's opulence, Tony mentions Margot's family wealth. "Why do you think she married you?" Lesgate asks eventually. "Well, I was a tennis star," Tony replies and Lesgate muses that it must have been more than that since Margot hasn't left him. "She nearly did," Tony says, mentioning some strange behavior Margot had been displaying while he was away in America for tennis tournaments. When he returned early to surprise her, Tony oversaw her cooking with her lover. The conversation takes a dark turn when Tony details all the ways he plotted to kill her and her lover.



A letter- Tony continues talking about Margot's behavior over the last year, explaining how letters would arrive for her from New York like clockwork every Thursday. "She burned them all except one," he says. "That one she used to transfer from handbag to handbag." He then describes stealing the letter and blackmailing his wife just to see what she'd do, allowing Lesgate to read the letter. "Why are you telling me all this?" Lesgate asks. "Because you're the only person I can trust," Tony replies with a smile. "To think that a year ago I sat in the Knightsbridge pub actually planning to murder her. And I might have done it if I hadn't seen something that changed my mind."



An alibi- "Well?" Lesgate asks curiously. "What did you see?" Tony smiles but it doesn't reach his eyes: "I saw you. Only a week before I'd been to a reunion dinner and the fellas were talking about you, how you'd been court-martialed during the war, a year in prison." Using his knowledge of Lesgate's previous crimes, affairs he's having with several married women, and his gambling addiction, Tony convinces Lesgate to stay and listen to a scheme. He says that he worked out a handsome life insurance payout on Margot should she ever be killed. He wanted to go through with his plot, but he realized he was missing something; a good alibi. Tony thought Lesgate could solve that problem for him.



"Where's the nearest police station?"- Unshaken by Tony's veiled threats and talk of murder, Lesgate approaches the door. "Where's the nearest police station?" He asks Tony. "Opposite the church," Tony replies plainly. "Two minutes' walk. What would you tell them?" "Everything," Lesgate replies defiantly. "I almost wish you would," Tony grins. "It'd be a straight case of your word against mine," Tony says he'd just say Lesgate appeared at his flat, half-drunk, and tried to borrow money and would then try and pin the blackmail of his wife on his former schoolmate. He grins, mentioning that the letter now has Lesgate's fingerprints on it. Trapped in Tony's plot, Lesgate slowly sits, deciding to try and talk things out.



Lesgate's character- Tony grins while describing in detail just how he would refute Lesgate's hypothetical accusations, explaining that not only the fingerprints on the letter but Tony's fame would seal his fate. There would certainly be pictures of them both in the news. "And sooner or later," Tony concludes, "there'd be a deputation of landladies and lodgers who would step forward to testify to your character." Tony then makes several veiled threats concerning all of Lesgate's various lovers. Lesgate scoffs, unhappy to be stuck in this situation. "What makes you think I'll agree?" he finally asks. "For the same reason," Tony replies, "that a donkey with a stick behind him and a carrot in front always goes forwards and not backwards."



Bank statement- "Tell me about the carrot," Lesgate says, resigning to his part in the plot. "£1,000 in cash," Tony replies with a crooked smile. "For a murder?" Lesgate replies in shock. "A few minutes of work is all it is," Tony says, walking closer to the couch. "And no risk. I guarantee." Lesgate asks to see the money, but Tony says it's hidden for now. "As soon as you've delivered the 'goods,' I shall mail you the checkroom ticket and the key to the case." For the meantime, he offers him £100 "on account." when Lesgate states that this could lead the police back to Tony, he smiles, explaining that he used the same cash-exchange scheme he'd used in Margot's blackmail. Lesgate demands some proof, asking to see Tony's bank statement. At the desk, Tony calmly takes out his bank book, pointing to the notable transactions after asking Lesgate not to touch it.



The plan- Lesgate seems satisfied with the proof, asking when the murder will take place. Tony says, "Tomorrow night." "Not a chance!" Lesgate says angrily. "I've gotta think this over." Tony is insistent, however, explaining the arrangement: "Tomorrow evening, Halliday, her American boyfriend, and I will go out to a stag party. She'll stay here... At exactly three minutes to 11, you'll enter the house through the street door." By now, the conversation has moved to the front door. Tony steps out, but Lesgate and the camera remain inside the flat. "You'll find the key to this door under the carpet," Tony says, sliding a house key beneath the carpet on the stairs, "here." The rest of the plan is brutally straightforward: Lesgate will strangle Margot after she picks up Tony's timed phone call.



Keys- “Well what happens next?” Lesgate asks. Tony explains that he’ll leave a suitcase nearby to help Lesgate stage the scene as a robbery gone wrong. He must then unlock the garden window and leave through the front door, putting the key back under the staircase carpet before he leaves. Lesgate then wonders how Tony will enter the house, and Tony says he’ll have his own key, hiding Margot’s key under the carpet for Lesgate to use. “When I come back with Halliday,” Tony explains, “I’ll use my own key to let us in. Then, while he’s out searching the garden or something, I’ll take the key from under the carpet and return it to her handbag.” Lesgate, still unsatisfied, asks how many keys there are for the door. “Just hers and mine,” Tony replies.



Call from Margot- The phone rings, interrupting the conversation. Tony crosses to the desk and answers. “Maida Vale 499,” Tony says. It’s Margot on the other end, calling during the play’s intermission and begging him to come join her and Mark. “Well, I don’t think so,” Tony replies. “I hardly seem to have started!” Lesgate walks towards the bedroom, causing Tony to interrupt his conversation and cover the receiver. “You can be seen from the bedroom window,” he says quietly but caustically, causing Lesgate to move with more caution. The soon-to-be murderer turns off all the lights in an attempt to practice for tomorrow night’s murder. Tony and Lesgate stare at each other for a few moments before Lesgate picks up the stack of pound notes Tony offered earlier, thumbing through them before stuffing them in his coat pocket. A dramatic chord strikes as the camera focuses on Tony’s smiling face.



Martinis- The next day, the camera fades in on the Wendice home, focusing on the desk phone, then the garden window, and then the front door before finding Tony stirring away. “Don’t make that martini too watery,” Margot says from the couch, sorting through newspaper clippings for a photo. Mark sits beside her, flipping through a scrapbook. When he brings the drinks to Mark and Margot, Tony asks why she hasn’t put more of her clippings into her scrapbooks, suggesting she do so tonight while Mark and he are at the stag party



Writing- Eventually, the conversation turns to writing. “How do you write a detective story?” Tony asks Mark. “Well you forget detection and concentrate on crime,” Mark replies. “Crime’s the thing. I usually put myself in the criminal’s shoes and ask myself: ‘What do I do next?’” “Do you really believe in the perfect murder?” asks Tony. “Yes,” Mark replies. “On paper, that is.” Tony is interested in knowing why Mark thinks no one could commit a perfect murder. “Well, in stories,” Mark answers, “things turn out the way the author wants. And in real life, they don’t always.” They finish their martinis, preparing to leave. Mark talks about his plans for the next day, while Margot suggests they meet for lunch.



“I may want to go out”- Tony stares at the lock on the door for a moment before speaking up: “Darling, did I lend you my latchkey? I can’t seem to find it anywhere.” Margot says she might have put both into her purse by mistake and goes to look. Tony wants to borrow her key when she only finds one, but she’s resistant: “I may want to go out.” She wants to catch a movie since the radio program she usually listens to is featuring a thriller and she’ll be too scared listening all alone. “I’ll be back before you,” she says, suggesting she simply let them in later in the evening. Tony says she’ll be asleep by the time he and Mark return, but seeing his plan going nowhere, he pretends to have found his key hidden between his gloves.



“We won’t go”- Tony, still needing Margot’s key for his plan, changes tactics, saying she won’t be able to get a movie ticket this late on a Saturday. “Don’t make me stay home,” she says huffily. “You know how I hate doing nothing?” “Doing nothing?” Tony says, bewildered. “Why, there are hundreds of things you can do.” He lists several, but Margot seems uninterested. “Very well,” Tony says somberly. “We won’t go.” He keeps up this act for long enough that Margot finally agrees to stay in, wanting the men she loves to get to know one another



Key- Mark leaves to hail a cab, and Margot organizes her clippings on the desk. She sends Tony to fetch her scissors from the mending basket. Sensing an opportunity to get her key, Tony starts to pilfer her purse for change for the cab. She giggles playfully while he digs through her purse behind his back. The camera focuses on Tony's hands, skillfully manipulating her coin purse without looking and palming her latchkey before giving her the purse. When Tony moves to leave, Mark appears. "Taxi's here," he says while Tony looks at the staircase behind him. Tony thinks for several heartbeats, the camera looking at his fist clutched around Margot's key. "Tony," Margot says after a moment. "What are you waiting for?" Tony smiles and says it's nothing before exiting the flat. Doubling back and calling for Margot, Tony approaches the door, leaning on the staircase while he talks to his wife about a potential phone call from his boss. Finally, he and Mark leave. The camera swings to the staircase, finding the key glimmering in its hiding place.



Return to 61a- Later that evening, the camera picks out Lesgate walking along dark streets. Passing from shadow to shadow, he approaches 61a. He pauses for a moment to look at his watch: It reads 10:55. Inside, Margot lies asleep in bed. Lesgate slinks in through the street door, pausing to slowly and silently close it before crossing to the flat. He finds the key on the staircase, looking doubtfully up the stairs before turning and unlocking the flat door. Inside, a fire burns low, but enough to illuminate the room. Lesgate looks at the fire, pondering his options before moving to the desk. After a few more moments of deliberation, he hides himself behind the curtain, a scarf held between his fists. He looks down at his watch: It reads 10:58.



Stag party- Men in tuxedos laugh and talk in a smoke-filled room. The camera finds Mark and Tony among them. Tony, apparently bored with the conversation, looks down at his watch: It reads 10:40. Dramatic music plays before the camera returns to the flat where Lesgate checks his watch, looking at the phone with a stressed look. Back at the party, Tony checks his watch again only to find that it still reads 10:40. He asks abruptly what time it is before rushing off to place a phone call. Tony waits impatiently for an older man to finish his call before entering the phone booth. He puts his finger on the 6, covering up the 'M' just beneath it, and dials. An electro-mechanical telephone switch chatters somewhere down the line, connecting Tony's call.



The phone rings- Lesgate moves to creep out of the flat, tired of waiting when the phone begins ringing. Lesgate looks down at Margot's bedroom door and sees the light come on. Margot stumbles out of bed and makes her way to the phone, rubbing her head when she answers, her back to the windows. Dramatic music rises to a crescendo when Lesgate appears behind her, silently positioning the scarf to strangle her. The music disappears for a moment as Margot tries to get the phone to connect, not hearing anything. When the receiver dips below her chest, Lesgate strikes, tightening the scarf around Margot's neck. Tony listens, over the dropped phone, to the struggle.



The best-laid plans- Tense music plays as Margot tries to fight off her attacker. Struggling with her back on the desk, her hand grasps for something, anything. She grips the scissors left there from her scrapbook work that evening. With a single strike, she plants the blade deep into Lesgate's back. He tenses in pain and drops on top of her, letting go of the scarf. He bolts upright again quickly, struggling to reach the scissors driven deep into his back. Either from the pain or his lungs filling with blood, Lesgate passes out, falling backward on the scissors and driving them even deeper into his back. He lies there, motionless, his eyes lifeless. Margot manages to recover somewhat, grasping the phone and calling for Help.



Tony's return- "Margot?" Tony asks with concern in his voice. "Tony, thank God. Come back at once." "What's the matter?" Tony asks, fear in his eyes: His plan is coming undone. Tony listens while Margot runs through the attack. He tells her not to call anyone or touch anything and that he'll be home as soon as possible. Margot stumbles outside for fresh air, flinging the garden door open and dropping the scarf that was wrapped around her throat. She stumbles back inside, fleeing to her bedroom after laying eyes on the body. Tony tells Mark that Margot isn't feeling well, telling him to stay at the party before leaving. In the back of a taxi, tense music plays while Tony thinks, his eyes darting around. Inside, Margot leaps into his arms in tears, and he asks her what's happened. She tells him again while he looks from the key in his hand to his wife's purse to Lesgate's body on the floor. He moves over to the corpse and examines it before rifling through his pockets. Margot then leaves the room to take an aspirin, and Tony quickly takes the key from Lesgate's pocket and places it in Margot's purse.



Calling the police- After Tony fetches a blanket to cover the body, Margot asks him to close the garden door. He says they shouldn't touch anything until after the police arrive. Margot says she hasn't called the police because Tony told her not to talk to anyone. Tony picks up the phone and calls for the police, making a quick report before hanging up. Margot says she'll get dressed as she'll have to speak to the police, but Tony insists that she stay in the bedroom and answer their questions tomorrow when she's recovered from her shock. He ushers her into the bedroom and closes the door behind her.

Tampering- Tony quickly assesses the scene, taking a moment to think after finding the scarf outside. He crosses to the fireplace, where he burns the scarf using lighter fluid, poking the ashes down into the coals with a fire poker. From Margot's mending box, he grabs her stockings, knotting one as if it was modified for strangulation before dropping it outside and hiding the other beneath the blotting-pad on the desk. He turns his attention back to Lesgate's corpse, quickly but carefully planting Mark's letter to Margot in his coat pocket. With the police set to arrive any moment, Tony sits in an armchair and lights a cigarette. A group of detectives and crime scene investigators fill the room sometime later. A high-angle shot shows us much of the action when Tony enters the room with a tray filled with teacups. As Tony sets the tray down on the desk, he nudges the blotting-pad to reveal the stocking underneath. He walks away with a cup for Margot and overhears a policeman saying he's found "the other stocking."



Straightening stories- After the intermission card, Tony looks beneath the blotting-pad, bright morning light shining in through the window behind him. Stressful music plays when he crosses the room and notices the lighter fluid. Margot enters the room while Tony holds the lighter fluid, playing off the action as if he were checking how much was left, mentioning they should buy a new can. He then mentions that a policeman wanted to know why Margot didn't call the police. She says Tony told her not to talk to anyone. Tony tells her he told the police a slightly different story: "I said you didn't phone the police because you assumed that I would do it from the hotel." Margot is confused by this, but Tony convinces her it is to keep the police from sniffing around, asking her to remember the details when she is questioned.



Inspector Hubbard- The door buzzer rings abruptly. “That’ll be Mark,” Tony says, asking Margot to answer. She opens the door to reveal a mustachioed man. He politely removes his hat and says, “I’m a police officer. May I come in?” Margot invites him in before stepping away to tell Tony. While she’s gone, the policeman wanders around the room for a moment, fixing his gaze on the small carpet where the corpse had been. He notes the location of the phone on the desk when Tony walks in. “I’m Inspector Hubbard,” Hubbard says. Tony insists that they’ve told the police everything they know, but Hubbard says there are a few details that need clearing up. Margot appears, and the couple show Hubbard around the house. Hubbard clears up Tony’s alibi before turning his attention to Margot. He sits down, preparing to question her.



Swann- “Have you any idea who he was?” Margot asks the Inspector. Hubbard says they do but, “[t]here still seems to be some confusion as to his real name. He appeared to have several.” The camera watches Tony watching the Inspector with a strange look on his face. Hubbard shows Margot several pictures, but she insists that she didn’t look at the man who tried to kill her. Not making headway, Hubbard passes the photographs to Tony, who looks over them with interest. He makes a show of making up his mind, saying the photo resembles someone he went to college with, while the Inspector runs down a list of aliases: “Was it Lesgate? Wilson? Swann?” “Yes,” Tony says, “that’s it.” He shows Hubbard a large group photo from a college reunion dinner and he agrees they look to be the same man. Tony then mentions that he saw Swann in passing at Victoria station about six months before.



Exactly what happened- Hubbard asks for Margot to “show him exactly what happened last night.” Margot reacts with fear, but Tony tells her she has to. She retraces her steps from the bedroom to the phone. Hubbard seems to interrupt and clarify everything Margot says and does, trying to get the clearest possible picture of the attack. Tony watches with a worried look from the couch. When Margot says the attacker had to be in the curtains, Tony speaks up, saying he closed them himself.



Sure he was dead- Hubbard reveals that the crime scene investigation showed no signs of a break-in. He questions Margot about why she didn't call the police or a doctor. Margot simply states the man was obviously dead. "Did you feel his pulse?" Hubbard demands. "Anyone would have realized he was dead. Just one look at those staring eyes..." Hubbard catches Margot in this lie: "So you did see his face after all." Tony stands up to defend his wife when Hubbard reveals that the police are certain the murdered man entered through the front door.



The bag- "How many keys are there to this door?" Hubbard asks. "Only two," Margot says. "Mine was in my handbag." "What makes you think he came in this way," Tony says, unable to hide his indignation. "His shoes," Hubbard says plainly, explaining that there was no mud tracked in from the garden and that he wiped his feet on the mat outside the building. Seeing that the police are a step ahead of him, Tony decides to bring up Margot's stolen bag. After some conversation, Hubbard realizes the situation is more complicated than he realized, asking both Tony and Margot to come down to the station to make a statement.



Mark drops by- The buzzer rings and Inspector Hubbard opens the door to find Mark. Tony introduces the two quickly before Hubbard asks for him to confirm Tony's alibi. When Mark does, Hubbard tells him that Tony was on the phone with Margot when the attack happened. "Did you phone Margot before or after your boss?" Mark asks, confused. Margot speaks up as well: "Why did you telephone me last night?" When Hubbard demands some clarity, Tony says he called Margot to look up his boss' telephone number at his country house, saying further that he never phoned his boss. Hubbard asks Mark for his contact information, and Tony and Margot walk off to prepare to go to the police station.



“You and Mrs. Wendice”- “Have you been over here before, sir?” Hubbard asks Mark while he writes down his hotel address. “Yes,” he replies. “About a year ago.” Hubbard takes the address from Mark and asks Tony to make sure that the rear gate is unlocked so they can go out that way. There’s a bothersome crowd out front trying to gawk at the police crime scene. After Tony leaves, Hubbard turns to face Mark, asking, “How much does he know about you and Mrs. Wendice?” Mark feigns ignorance, but he changes his mind when Hubbard tells him the dead man had one of Margot’s love letters in his pocket. Margot returns, and Hubbard presses her for more information on the missing letter. Mark tells her they found it on the dead man and gives Hubbard Tony’s blackmail letters. With this new information, Hubbard asks Mark to come with them to the station, and he agrees



The Inspector’s doubt- Before they leave, Hubbard addresses Margot, telling her that she has to be truthful with him if they are to solve this murder, giving her one last chance to make a statement. They only have her word that the killing was in self-defense. Further, there’s no evidence Swann was there to burglarize the flat. “There is evidence, however, that he was blackmailing you.” Based on all the evidence he has, Hubbard concludes that Margot had to let Swann into the flat and then killed him to stop the blackmail. It’s the pair of stockings that seals Margot’s fate in the police’s eyes. Tony acts outraged, crossing to the phone and dialing a lawyer. They all leave together for the police station, Tony stopping to straighten the rug over the blood stain.



Trial- The trial takes place in a somewhat experimental sequence. Margot sits in front of a mottled gray background, a strong spotlight moving in a timed sequence around her off-screen to show the passage of time. Lawyers and the judge speak off-screen. They lay out the evidence, Margot shaking her head to answer questions. Finally, the judge asks the jury for their verdict. They say guilty, and the judge reads the sentence: “The sentence of this court is that you be taken to the place from whence you came, from thence to a place of lawful execution...” The scene fades out with red light shining all around Margot.



Mark's desperation- A taxi, with Mark inside, speeds down the road in front of 61a. He sees Tony enter the building. Tony barely has time to put down his coat before Mark rings the buzzer. Quickly, Tony hides a case under the blankets on the bed and answers the door. Mark steps in, noting that Tony is sleeping in a single bed in the living room. "Have you gotten any news from the Home Secretary?" Mark asks, and Tony hands him a telegram. They both look somber: It's bad news. "Then it's tomorrow," Mark says, telling Tony they have to do something to save Margot's life. "Margot was convicted because nobody believed her story," Mark says with conviction, saying that the evidence was circumstantial.



Reason- Tony tries to stop Mark from continuing, but he won't. "Wait a minute, Tony. Now, hear me out. This is where you come in. You go to the police and tell them some story, anything that will convince them Margot wasn't lying after all." He tells Tony to tell the police he left his key outside the flat. Tony keeps speaking up in resistance, but Mark plows through. "You can even say that you two [Tony and Lesgate] met somewhere and you planned this whole thing together." "Planned what?" Tony asks indignantly. "To kill her," Mark says seriously. Once again, Tony tries to get Mark to stop speaking, but he continues: "All you gotta do is support everything she said." Tony doesn't see how killing a man over blackmail makes sense, and Mark lays out the blackmail scheme that Tony pulled six months prior. "It's tough for us to see," Mark says, "Because we both love her, but we need a reason now. We need it badly." Mark points out their life insurance policy as a motive, trying to convince Tony to go forward and save Margot's life, saying they can't hang him for attempted murder.

Connection with a robbery- Tony begins to argue with Mark, saying he couldn't offer money to Swann to convince him. Mark argues back even harder when the street door opens. The door buzzer rings and Tony moves to answer the door. "Hello, Inspector," he says. Mark reacts quickly, silently running to the bedroom and closing the door. Hubbard enters, saying he's "making inquiries in connection with a robbery." He apologizes for the interruption, and Tony agrees to help if only to get the inspector out of his hair. Hubbard says he's looking for hundreds of one-pound notes, wondering if Tony has sold anything recently. Tony is confused, and Hubbard clarifies, saying that Tony has been paying off all his accounts for the last week or so, and he wants to know how Tony came into the money if it didn't come from his bank account.



Dog racing- The camera watches Hubbard take a key out of his pocket. He mimes bending over to pick it up, asking Tony if it's his. Tony finds his in the pocket of his overcoat, and Hubbard tries to open the flat's lock with it, finding that it doesn't. "May be mine," the Inspector says, soon finding a hole in the pocket of his overcoat. "That's the trouble with these latchkeys: they're all alike." The conversation turns back to the money. As Hubbard lists off several more accounts that Tony has paid off recently, Mark discovers the suitcase on the bed. He moves it aside, listening to the conversation in the living room intently. "I simply won it at dog racing," Tony says. Hubbard asks why Tony didn't tell him outright, and Tony replies that he was embarrassed to be caught gambling while his wife is on death row.



"Before you go"- Seemingly satisfied, Hubbard gathers his things and prepares to leave. Tony is about to close the door behind him when the inspector turns around, asking about an attaché case. Tony says that his has gone missing when, inside the bedroom, Mark realizes that the case is right beside him. Mark decides to look inside, prying open the locks while Hubbard interrogates Tony about the case. Inside are bundles of one-pound notes. Hubbard is about to leave once again when Mark speaks: "Inspector, before you go... I think Mr. Wendice has something to tell you." When Tony isn't forthcoming, Mark invites the inspector to look at something in the bedroom. Hubbard marvels at the case, saying, "There must be £500 here."



Lies upon lies- Mark begins telling his reconstruction of the crime, saying the money was left over from the money Tony collected to pay Swann to murder his wife. "It wasn't necessary to pay Swann after all," Mark continues. "So he lived on it. He's been living on it since the 27th of March." Tony tries to play this off as a crazy story, but Hubbard keeps listening while Mark explains how the murder could have been planned, getting some points right. Tony offers up his bank statement, Mark nervously and impatiently trying to point out the odd sums to the inspector, showing how they add up to about £1000 for the year. Then, Tony delivers a story of the night of the crime, saying Margot killed Swann to get the letter back. He says he saw a check made out to Swann in Margot's checkbook.



“All for nothing”- Hubbard barely reacts to Tony’s story, saying, “I must say, I suspected something like this.” Mark can barely contain his anger and panic, saying, “You’re not even gonna check on this? She’s being hanged tomorrow!” Tony senses an opportunity to get rid of Mark, asking him to leave. Mark says he’ll leave, warning Tony that he’s made a mistake: “What’ll happen when Margot hears about this? Perhaps she’ll change her will. You’ll have done it all for nothing, Tony.” Tony closes the door after Mark and turns to the inspector, asking if anyone would have believed Mark’s story. Hubbard chuckles and shakes his head, saying there’s always someone making a fuss before an execution, and he probably would have been ignored. Not wanting to bump into Mark, Hubbard asks Tony to see if he’s gone. When Tony leaves, Hubbard quickly exchanges his overcoat for Tony’s, the latchkey still in the pocket.



“Start the ball rolling”- Tony and Inspector Hubbard shake hands. As soon as he closes the door, Tony’s facade drops: keeping up appearances has tired him out. He pours a large glass of whiskey and downs it in a gulp. After checking his watch, Tony moves to the bedroom and shoves several bundles of notes into his pockets from inside the attaché case. He grabs Hubbard’s overcoat and quickly exits the building. Hubbard watches from a concealed location on the staircase. Outside, Mark stands by the corner of the building, smoking. He watches as Tony walks away. Inside, Hubbard pulls the latchkey from Tony’s overcoat pocket and unlocks the flat door. Once inside, he turns on a flashlight and crosses to the phone, dialing a number. “Start the ball rolling,” he says while triumphant music plays.



A surprise- Suddenly, the buzzer rings and someone begins knocking on the door. “Inspector,” Mark says and identifies himself. Hubbard lets out a frustrated sigh and lets Mark inside, asking him, “Now, what are you up to?” Mark tries to pitch his plan to have Tony arrested again, but Hubbard interrupts him. “Shut up. You want to save Mrs. Wendice? Keep quiet. Let me handle this.” Mark looks confused, stammering while trying to question the inspector. Hubbard scoffs. “You’d better prepare yourself for a surprise, Mr. Halliday.” A car horn sounds outside, and Hubbard moves to the window. There, he sees two detectives help Margot out of a car.



Margot's key- Crossing back to the front door, Hubbard shines his light on the door's lock. Outside, Margot tries to enter the apartment with her key, but it doesn't work. Mark moves to say something, but Hubbard silently cuts him off. Margot rings the buzzer twice before walking back outside, Hubbard moving back to the window to watch. Mark is stunned, asking what's going on. "May the saints protect us from the gifted amateur," Hubbard says before opening the garden door, letting light into the room. Margot appears, guided by the detectives. Romantic music swells when Mark speaks her name.



Examining Tony's evidence- Margot wants to know where Tony is, but neither Mark nor Hubbard knows. Margot then asks why they didn't let her in when she rang, saying her key didn't work. Satisfied that she didn't realize the real problem with her key, Hubbard retrieves the now-empty attaché case, telling her that Tony's "explained this." She says she doesn't understand. He asks one of the detectives to take Margot's purse for evidence and to move the car out front. Mark and Margot are reunited for a moment. Mark asks how she got to the flat, and she says she doesn't know, she was just following the warden's orders. When the inspector returns, he begins turning off all the lights. Mark demands to know what he's doing.



The truth- "Mrs. Wendice," Hubbard begins, removing his hat, "what I'm about to tell you may come as a shock... We strongly suspect that your husband had planned to murder you." Margot is numb, asking, "Shouldn't I break down or something?" "It's delayed action," Mark says, comforting her. He then asks Hubbard what he's found out. Hubbard has a long laundry list of evidence. Firstly, Tony had been spending hundreds of pound notes all over town. He then explains how he stole Margot's key when he visited her in prison, trying it out and finding that it didn't work. Before he can explain further, a thump upstairs signals Hubbard. He crosses to the door, turning off the light and talking to the detective upstairs. "Wendice!" the man hisses.



Tony's return- Watching from the front window, Hubbard sees Tony realize that his key is missing. "That was a near one," Hubbard says, relieved, after crossing the room to the telephone. He dials a number and tells a detective to release from evidence several things including Margot's faulty key, asking him to call back when Tony leaves the police station. Meanwhile, Mark steps outside, looking around for where the spare key is hidden.

"Have you got it?"- Hubbard hangs up the phone and moves to the front door, asking Mark, "Have you got it?" Mark admits that he's stumped, asking the inspector where Margot's key is. Hubbard moves to the staircase and retrieves the key, saying it took him half an hour to find it before putting it back. The inspector then reveals that Tony must believe that Margot's key is still in her handbag, catching the two up to speed on his plan: if Tony knows where the key was hidden, he was the one who plotted Margot's murder.



Swann's key- The phone rings, signaling Tony has left the police station. Margot sinks into a chair, the gravity of the situation finally hitting her. "Try and hang on just a little bit longer," Hubbard says before shouting up to the detective on the landing to prepare himself. They lie silently in wait. In the foyer, Tony fumbles with Margot's purse, drawing out Swann's key. When it doesn't work, his footsteps retreat while the camera watches the three gathered inside. Hubbard peeks from the front window, observing Tony make an observation before returning inside. By the staircase, he draws out Margot's key from its hiding place beneath the stair carpet and opens the door.



Confession- A dramatic chord strikes when Tony turns on the lights and sees Mark and Margot standing together. Another plays when he turns to see Hubbard by the desk. In a panic, Tony whips around, another dramatic cord playing when the detective from upstairs blocks his path. Seeing that he's caught, Tony calmly closes the door, sad music beginning to play. He turns to Mark and says, "As you said... It might work out on paper but... Congratulations, Inspector." After uncorking a bottle of scotch on the desk, he passes Hubbard's key back to him. He begins pouring drinks for everyone while Hubbard dials a number on the phone. The screen fades to black while he begins stroking his bushy mustache with a comb from his pocket, waiting for the line to connect.

