

Scene Two

As the lights come up, SIDNEY has unlocked the front door from the outside and is showing CLIFFORD ANDERSON into the foyer, while MYRA, who has been fretting in the study, hurries to greet them. The draperies are drawn over the french doors, and all the room's lamps are lighted. SIDNEY has replaced his sweater with a jacket; MYRA has freshened up and perhaps changed into a simple dress. CLIFFORD is in his mid-twenties and free of obvious defects; an attractive young man in jeans, boots, and a heavy sweater. He carries a bulging manilla envelope.

SIDNEY Actually it was built in seventeen-ninety-four but they were out of nines at the hardware store so I backdated it ten years.

CLIFFORD It's a beautiful house...

SIDNEY *(closing the door)* Historical Society had kittens.

MYRA Hello!

She offers her hand; CLIFFORD shakes it warmly.

SIDNEY This is Clifford Anderson, dear. My wife Myra.

CLIFFORD Hello. It's a pleasure to meet you.

MYRA Come in. I was beginning to worry...

SIDNEY Watch out for the beam.

Ducking, CLIFFORD comes into the study, SIDNEY follows.

You can always tell an authentic Colonial by the visitors' bruised foreheads.

MYRA *smiles nervously.* CLIFFORD *looks about, awed.*

CLIFFORD The room you work in?

SIDNEY How did you guess.

CLIFFORD The typewriter, and all these posters...

He moves about, studying the window cards. SIDNEY watches him; MYRA glances at SIDNEY. CLIFFORD touches the Masters covered typewriter, then points at the wall.

Is that the mace that was used in Murderer's Child?

SIDNEY Yes. And the dagger is from The Murder Game.

CLIFFORD *goes closer and touches the dagger blade.*

Careful, it's sharp. The trick one was substituted in Act Two.

CLIFFORD *(moving his hands to an axe handle)* In For The Kill?

SIDNEY Yes.

CLIFFORD I can't understand why that play didn't run...

SIDNEY Critics peeing on it might be the answer.

CLIFFORD *goes on with his inspection.*

MYRA The train must have been late.

SIDNEY *pays no notice.*

Was it?

CLIFFORD *(turning)* No, Mr Bruhl was. The train was on time.

SIDNEY I had to get gas, and Frank insisted on fondling the spark plugs.

CLIFFORD *(pointing at a window cord)* Do you know that Gunpoint was the first play I ever saw? I had an aunt in New York, and I came in on the train one Saturday-by myself, another first-from Hartford. She took me to the matinee. I was twelve years old.

SIDNEY If you're trying to depress me, you've made it.

CLIFFORD How? Oh. I'm sorry. But that's how I got hooked on thrillers.

SIDNEY Angel Street did it to me. "Bella, where is that grocery bill? Eh? What have you done with it, you poor wretched creature?" I was fifteen.

MYRA It sounds like a disease, being passed from generation to generation.

SIDNEY It is a disease: *thrilleritis malignis*, the fevered pursuit of the one-set five-character moneymaker.

CLIFFORD I'm not pursuing money. Not that I wouldn't like to have some, so that I could have a place like this to work in; but that isn't the reason I wrote Deathtrap.

SIDNEY You're still an early case.

CLIFFORD It's *not* a disease, it's a tradition: a superbly challenging theatrical framework in which every possible variation seems to have been played. Can I conjure up a few new ones? Can I startle an audience that's *been* on Angel Street, that's dialled "M" for murder, that's witnessed the prosecution, that's played the murder game—

SIDNEY Lovely speech! And thanks for saving me for last.

CLIFFORD I was coming to Sleuth.

SIDNEY I'm glad I stopped you.

CLIFFORD So am I. I'm a little-euphoric about all that's happening.

SIDNEY As well you should be.

MYRA Would you like something to drink?

CLIFFORD Yes, please. Do you have some ginger ale?

MYRA Yes. Sidney? Scotch?

SIDNEY No, dear, I believe I'll have ginger ale too.

Which gives MYRA a moment's pause, after which she goes to the buffet.

CLIFFORD These aren't *all* from your plays, are they?

SIDNEY God no, I haven't written *that* many. Friends give me things now, and I prowl the antique shops.

MYRA *There's* a disease.

SIDNEY (*taking his keys out*) Yes, and a super excuse for not working. (*Indicating a pistol while en route to the desk*) I found this in Ridgefield just the other day; eighteenth-century German.

CLIFFORD It's beautiful...

SIDNEY (*unlocking the desk's centre drawer*) As you can see, I'm taking very good care of my "spiritual child". Lock and key...

CLIFFORD (*unfastening his envelope*) I've got the original...

SIDNEY (*taking the manuscript from the drawer*) Thank God. I should really be wearing glasses but my doctor told me the longer I can do without them, the better off I am. (*Offering the manuscript in the wrong direction*) Here you are. Oh, there you are.

CLIFFORD smiles; MYRA turns to look and turns back to her ice and glasses. CLIFFORD takes a rubber-banded manuscript from the envelope.

CLIFFORD It's not in a binder. For the Xeroxing...

SIDNEY Makes no never-mind. (*They exchange manuscripts*)

CLIFFORD I've got the first draft here too. (*Sits by the desk*) There's a scene between Diane and Carlo in Act One that I may have been wrong to cut, and the Diane-and-Richard scene starts earlier, before they know Carlo is back.

SIDNEY (*sitting behind the desk*) Did you do several drafts?

CLIFFORD Just the one. It's a mess, but I think you'll be able to decipher it, if you'd like to see those two scenes.

SIDNEY I would. By all means.

CLIFFORD extracts a less tidy manuscript from the envelope.

I had a feeling there was a Diane-and-Carlo scene I wasn't seeing... Before the murder?

CLIFFORD Yes. I was afraid the act would run too long. (*Hands the second manuscript over*)

SIDNEY Thanks. What else do you have in there?

CLIFFORD Oh, the outline, which I departed from considerably. I made it the way you suggested, a page per scene, loose leaf. And some lines I jotted down and never got to use.

SIDNEY Threw away the ones you did use as you used them?

CLIFFORD Yes.

SIDNEY Same way I work...

MYRA *crosses with glasses of ginger ale.*

CLIFFORD Everything was in the one envelope, so I just grabbed it. Thank you.

MYRA You're welcome. (*She gives SIDNEY his glass, along with an intent look*)

SIDNEY Thanks...

CLIFFORD It's a two-hour walk to the station, so I had to leave right after we talked.

MYRA *withdraws left.*

SIDNEY *Two hours?*

CLIFFORD I walk longer than that; I'm one writer who's not going to get flabby. I work out with weights every morning. I came *this close* to making the Olympic decathlon team.

SIDNEY Really?

CLIFFORD (*hands apart*) Well, *this close*.

SIDNEY I'll be careful not to argue with you. I'm on the Olympic sloth team. Gold medal. Fall asleep in any position. (*Raises his glass, falls asleep, wakes up*) Deathtrap.

CLIFFORD Deathtrap.

MYRA Deathtrap.

SIDNEY *turns, MYRA is seated at left, glass in hand, needlework in her lap.*

It'll be toasted with more than ginger ale some day, if Sidney is right about it, and I'm sure he is.

CLIFFORD I hope so. I toasted it with beer the other night.

MYRA We have some. Would you rather?

CLIFFORD No, no, this is fine, thanks.

SIDNEY Are you planning to stay in here?

MYRA Yes.

CLIFFORD (*manuscript open on his lap*) Do you think I overdid the set description? All the exact locations for each piece of furniture?

SIDNEY The set description? (*Looking in the original manuscript*) I don't remember anything wrong with it... No, this is perfect, couldn't be better. (*Turns pages*) You certainly type beautifully... Electric?

CLIFFORD No. I can't see electric typewriters; if there's a power failure you can't work.

SIDNEY That's the whole point in owning one. (*Turning another page*) No, the real trouble with them, I find—with Zenobia here, at any rate—is that you can make only one decent carbon. The second carbon is so muddy as to be almost illegible.

CLIFFORD *turns a page. MYRA leans forward nervously.*

You don't have that problem with—

MYRA (*interrupting the question*) Sidney has some wonderful ideas for improving the play, Mr Anderson!

CLIFFORD I'm—sure he does. I'm looking forward to hearing them.

SIDNEY looks to PORTER, who nods infinitesimally.

SIDNEY Would you mind?

CLIFFORD I have to do it sometime before dinner; might as well.

SIDNEY All right. (*Heading for the foyer*) Be with you in a second, Porter.

PORTER Take your time. I haven't started the clock yet!

SIDNEY is out and on his way upstairs.

CLIFFORD smiles as he rolls the paper from his typewriter. PORTER sits downstage right and puts his briefcase down.

I love this room.

CLIFFORD Isn't it nice? It's a pleasure working here. (*Puts the paper and the page he finished earlier into the folder, behind other sheets in it*)

PORTER He's looking well...

CLIFFORD Yes, he's picked up quite a bit in the past few days. (*Putting the folder into the desk and locking the drawer unobtrusively*) It was pretty bad the first week. He cried every night; I could hear him plainly. And he was drinking heavily.

PORTER Ah...

CLIFFORD (*standing against the desk*) But he'll pull through. His work is a great solace to him.

PORTER I'm sure it must be. I've always envied my writer clients on that account. I tried a play once.

CLIFFORD Oh?

PORTER About the Supreme Court justice I most admire. But even the title was a problem. *Frankfurter...* (*He shakes his head ruefully*)

CLIFFORD moves toward the doorway as SIDNEY comes in, wallet in hand.

SIDNEY Twenty enough?

CLIFFORD Too much; we only need salad things and milk. I'm going to Gibson's. (*Goes into the foyer*)

SIDNEY (*pocketing his wallet*) Pick up some yogurt too. Anything but prune.

CLIFFORD (*taking a jacket from the rack*) Okay. (*Getting into it; to PORTER*) You aren't in the driveway, are you?

PORTER No, I pulled over on the side.

CLIFFORD See you later or nice meeting you, whichever it turns out to be. (*Takes car keys from his pocket*)

PORTER I'm sure we'll be seeing each other again.

CLIFFORD nods to SIDNEY and goes out, closing the door behind him.

Pleasant young fellow... Good-looking too.

SIDNEY Yes... (*Turns to PORTER*) Do you think he's gay? Homosexual...

PORTER I know what "gay" means, Sidney. Elizabeth told me long ago. No, he didn't strike me that way.

SIDNEY I have a sneaking suspicion he might be... But, as long as he does his job well I suppose it's none of my business, is it?

PORTER Well, in essence he's a domestic employee, and I think that in such circumstances his sexual preference could be a legitimate matter of concern.

SIDNEY I wasn't asking for a legal opinion; I was just saying that it's really not my business.

PORTER Oh. In that case, no, it isn't.

SIDNEY The house madman is writing a play that'll send both of us to prison—

CLIFFORD It won't!

SIDNEY —I'm standing here terrified, petrified, horrified, stupefied, *crapping my pants*—and he calls that “having reservations”. I'm not going to use one of *those* on you; I'm going to beat you to death with *Roget's Thesaurus!*

CLIFFORD There is no possible way for anyone to prove what did or did not cause Myra's heart attack. Look, if I could change things I would, but I can't; it *has* to be a playwright. Who else can pretend to receive a finished work that could make tons of money?

SIDNEY A novelist! A composer! Why am I discussing this?

CLIFFORD A sure-fire smash-hit symphony? No. And would a novelist or a composer know where to get a garrotte that squirts blood, and how to stage a convincing murder? And it has to be a playwright *who writes thrillers*, because Arthur Miller probably has old sample cases hanging on his wall. I *suppose* I could make it Wilton instead of Westport...

SIDNEY Why make it *anywhere? Why make it?*

CLIFFORD It's *there*, Sidney!

SIDNEY That's mountains, not plays! Plays aren't there till some asshole writes them!

CLIFFORD Stop and think for a minute, will you? Think. About that night. Try to see it all from an audience's viewpoint. *Everything we did to convince Myra that she was seeing a real murder—would have exactly the same effect on them.* Weren't *we* giving a play? Didn't we write it, rehearse it? Wasn't *she* our audience? *(He rises)*

SIDNEY *is listening as one fascinated by a lunatic's raving.*

Scene One: Julian tells Doris about this terrific play that's come in the mail. He jokes about killing for it, then calls

Willard and invites him over, getting him to bring the original copy. Audience thinks exactly what Doris thinks: Julian might kill Willard. Scene Two: *everything that happened from the moment we came through that door.* All the little ups and downs we put in to make it ring true: the I'm-expecting-a-phone-call bit, everything. Tightened up a little, naturally. And then the strangling, which scares the audience as much as it does Doris.

SIDNEY No wonder you didn't need an outline...

CLIFFORD *(tapping his temple)* It's all up here, every bit of it. Scene Three: “Inga Van Bronk”. A few laughs, right? Can't hurt. Then Julian and Doris get ready to go upstairs—it looks as if the act is drawing to a kind of so-so close—and pow, in comes Willard, out of the grave and seeking vengeance. Shock? Surprise? Doris has her heart attack, Julian gets up from the fake beating—and the audience realises that Julian and Willard are in cahoots, that there isn't any sure-fire thriller, that Willard is moving in. The curtain is Julian burning the manuscripts. Or calling the doctor; I'm not sure which. Now be honest about it: isn't that a sure-fire first act?

SIDNEY Yes. And what an intermission. Twenty years to life.

CLIFFORD No one can prove it really happened. They *can't*. How can they?

SIDNEY And what do you say to the man from the Times, when he says, “Don't you work for Sidney Bruhl, and didn't his wife have a heart attack just around the time you came there?”

CLIFFORD *(turning out his hands for the obvious answer)* “No comment”.

SIDNEY Oh my God... *(Moves upstage in futility)*

CLIFFORD I know it's going to be a little sticky, but—well, everybody's opening up about everything these days, aren't they? In print, on TV; why not on stage, as long as it can't be proved? I've given it some serious thought, Sidney and I

honestly believe it'll *help* the play, give it an added dimension of—intriguing gossip.

SIDNEY I'm sure you're right. I can see the little box in New York Magazine now: "Tongues are wagging about interesting similarities between events in the new play Deathtrap and the private lives of its author Clifford Anderson and his employer Sidney Bruhl, who committed suicide on opening night. When queried, Mr Anderson said, 'No comment.' " I have a comment, Cliff. No. Absolutely, definitely *no*. I have a name and a reputation—tattered, perhaps, but still valid for dinner invitations, house seats, and the conducting of summer seminars. I want to live out my years as "author of The Murder Game" not "fag who knocked off his wife". (*Turns right*) Why look, a fieldstone fireplace! (*Heading for it, folder at the ready*) Let's see if it's practical to the extent that paper—

CLIFFORD (*interrupting him*) DON'T YOU DARE!

SIDNEY *stops*.

You burn that—and I go out of here and write it again somewhere else. I'll—get a house-sitting job. (*Goes to SIDNEY and puts out his hand*) Give it to me. Give it, Sidney.

SIDNEY *turns, and hands the folder to CLIFFORD*.

I helped you kill for the chance to become what I want to be. You're not going to take it away from me.

He goes to the desk, SIDNEY watches him.

I had *hoped* that when I showed you the finished draft, you would be impressed enough to—get over your Angel Street uptightness and pitch in, but I guess we can forget about *that*.

SIDNEY (*smiles faintly*) A collaboration?

CLIFFORD It's mostly your idea, isn't it? I'm not pretending it's all my baby. And I know that Scene One is coming out a

little-heavy and stilted. I hoped we could be a team, Bruhl and Anderson.

SIDNEY Rodgers and Heartless.

CLIFFORD Now you see, I could never come up with something like that.

SIDNEY I'm sorry, but I really don't feel like collaborating on my public humiliation.

CLIFFORD Next season's hit. Don't say I didn't ask.

SIDNEY *moves us, perturbed*. CLIFFORD, *standing by the desk playing with the folder, glances at him, and at the folder again*.

I think maybe I'd better move out anyway...

SIDNEY Why?

CLIFFORD When Helga ten Dorp said a woman was going to use the dagger because of a play—maybe she really wasn't that far off target.

SIDNEY *stands silently for a moment*. CLIFFORD *toys with the folder*.

SIDNEY Don't be silly. I—I love you; I wouldn't think of—trying to harm you. Besides, you'd break my neck.

CLIFFORD Goddamn right I would.

SIDNEY So don't talk about leaving.

CLIFFORD I don't know... I'm not going to feel comfortable with you being unhappy about this...

SIDNEY I'll whistle a lot. (*He comes to the desk*)

CLIFFORD *ruffles through the pages in the folder*.

SIDNEY *throws a quick worried glance at him, then looks thoughtfully into space*.

Maybe I *am* being—old-fashioned and uptight.

CLIFFORD You are. These days, jeez, who cares about anything?