

an ice-bucket, which she places on the buffet. SIDNEY notices her.

SIDNEY *Deathtrap.*

MYRA *turns.*

A thriller in two acts. One set, five characters. (*Lifts a manuscript in a paperboard binder*) A juicy murder in Act One, unexpected developments in Act Two. Sound construction, good dialogue, laughs in the right places. Highly commercial. (*Tosses the manuscript on the desk*)

MYRA Why—that's *wonderful*, darling! I'm so happy for you! For both of us!

SIDNEY Happy? Why on earth happy?

MYRA But—it's yours, isn't it? The idea you had in August?

SIDNEY The idea I had in August has gone the way of the idea I had in June, and the idea I had in whenever it was before then: in the fireplace, up the chimney, and out over Fairfield County—pollution in its most grisly form. This arrived in the mail this morning. It's the property of one— (*Finds the covering letter*) —Clifford Anderson. He was one of the twerps at the seminar. (*Reads the letter, twerpishly*) "Dear Mr Bruhl: I hope you don't mind my sending you my play *Deathtrap*, which I finished retyping at two o'clock this morning. Since I couldn't have written it without the inspiration of your own work and the guidance and encouragement you gave me last summer, I thought it only fitting that you should be the first person to read it. If you find it one-tenth as good as any of your own thrillers, I'll consider my time well spent and the fee for the seminar more than adequately recompensed."

MYRA (*sitting*) That's nice.

SIDNEY No it isn't, it's fulsome. "Please excuse the carbon copy; the local Xerox machine is on the fritz and I couldn't stand the thought of waiting a few days to send my *firstborn child*

off to its *spiritual father*." My italics, his emetics. "I hope you'll call or write as soon as you've read it and let me know whether you think it's worthy of submitting to" et cetera, et cetera. Son of a bitch even *types* well. (*Tosses the letter on the desk*) I think I remember him. Enormously obese. A glandular condition. Four hundred pounds. I wonder where he got my address...

MYRA From the university.

SIDNEY Probably. (*Rises and heads for the buffet*)

MYRA Is it really that good? His first play?

SIDNEY It can't miss. A gifted director couldn't even hurt it. (*Fixing something on the rocks*) It'll run for years. The stock and amateur rights will feed and clothe generations of Andersons. It can *easily* be opened up for a movie. George C. Scott—and Liv Ullmann.

MYRA (*rising*) And Trish Van DeVere.

SIDNEY There's a part in it for her too. The damn thing is perfect.

MYRA I should think you'd be proud that one of your students has written a saleable play.

SIDNEY (*considers her*) For the first time in eleven years of marriage, darling—drop dead.

MYRA My goodness...

She puts things right at the buffet as SIDNEY moves away with his drink.

SIDNEY I'm green with envy. I'd like to beat the wretch over the head with the mace there, bury him in a four-hundred-pound hole somewhere, and send the thing off under my own name. To... David Merrick. Or Hal Prince... (*Thinks a bit, looks at MYRA*) Now *there's* the best idea I've had in ages.

MYRA (*going to him*) Ah, my poor Sidney... (*Hugs him, kisses his cheek*)

SIDNEY I mean, what's the point in owning a mace if you don't use it once in a while?

MYRA Ah... You'll get an idea of your own, any day now, and it'll turn into a better play than that one.

SIDNEY Don't bet on it. Not that you have any money to bet with.

MYRA We're doing very nicely in that department: not one creditor beating at the door.

SIDNEY But for how long? I've just about cleaned you out now, haven't I?

MYRA We've cleaned me out, and it's been joy and delight every bit of the way. (*Kisses him*) Your next play will simply have to be a terrific smash.

SIDNEY (*moving away*) Thanks, that's what I need, an easing of the pressure. (*Moves to the desk, toys with the manuscript*)

MYRA Why don't you call it to Merrick's attention? Maybe you could get—a commission of some kind.

SIDNEY A finder's fee, you mean?

MYRA If that's what it's called.

SIDNEY A great and glorious one per cent. Maybe one and a half.

MYRA Or better yet, why don't you produce it yourself? You've been involved in enough productions to know how to do it. And it might be a beneficial change of pace.

SIDNEY Darling, I may be devious and underhanded enough to be a successful murderer, but not, I think, a Broadway producer. One mustn't overestimate one's talents.

MYRA Collaborate with him. Isn't there room for improvement in the play, good as it is? The professional touch, a little reshaping and sharpening?

SIDNEY That's a possibility...

MYRA I'm sure he'd be thrilled at the chance to work with you.

SIDNEY We'd split fifty-fifty...

MYRA And you'd get top billing.

SIDNEY Naturally. "Reverse alphabetical order, dear boy; it's done all the time."

MYRA On the basis of *who you are*.

SIDNEY Sidney Four-Flops Bruhl.

MYRA Sidney Author-of-The-Murder-Game Bruhl.

SIDNEY (*a doddering ancient*) "Oh yes, The Murder Game. I remember that one. Back in the time of King Arthur, wasn't it?"

MYRA Not quite that long ago.

SIDNEY Eighteen years, love. Eighteen years, each one flying faster than the one before. Nothing recedes like success. Mmm, that *is* a good one, isn't it. (*Taking up a memo pad and pen*) Maybe I can work it in someplace. There's a has-been actor who could say it. "Recedes" is E-D-E, right?

MYRA Yes. You see, you *would* improve it.

SIDNEY Give it the inimitable Sidney Bruhl flavour. Close in Boston. (*Puts the pad and pen down, picks up the letter*)

MYRA Call him now. Where does he live?

SIDNEY Up in Milford. (*Moves around nearer the phone. Studies the letter awhile, looks at MYRA*) You don't like the mace...

MYRA No, definitely not. Blood on the carpet. And the next day Helga ten Dorp would be picking up the psychic vibrations.

SIDNEY In Holland? I doubt it very much.

MYRA Sidney, what were you smoking Friday night when the rest of us were smoking grass? She's taken the McBain cottage for six months. Paul Wyman is doing a book with her. He was impersonating her for fifteen minutes.

SIDNEY Oh. I thought he was finally coming out of the closet.

MYRA You see what a fine murderer you'd be? Helga ten Dorp moves in practically on your doorstep, and you manage not to hear about it.

SIDNEY That *does* give one pause.

MYRA It certainly should. Nan and Tom Wesson had her to dinner last week and she told Tom about his backaches, and the money he put into silver, and his father's thing for tall women. She warned Nan that their *au pair* girl was going to leave, which she did two days later, and she found a set of keys Nan lost in nineteen-sixty-nine; they were under the clothes dryer.

SIDNEY Hm. She's in the McBain cottage?

MYRA (*pointing upstage right*) Right over yonder. Picking up our blips on her radar this minute, most likely.

SIDNEY Well! It seems that Mr Anderson has himself a collaborator. Not that I really believe in ESP..

MYRA The police in Europe seem to. That's half of why she's here; she's supposed to be resting. From pointing at murderers.

SIDNEY Wait a minute now, the fat one didn't stay the full week, and his name was—Quinn or Quincy. Anderson, Anderson. I wonder if he's the one with the awful stammer...

MYRA (*indicating the phone*) Easy way to find out.

SIDNEY Yes. Hm. (*Studies the letter for another moment, then puts it down, and referring to it, dials the phone*) This may be a three-hour conversation. (*Listens awhile, hangs up*) Busy. Probably talking to Merrick.

He frowns, waiting with his hand on the phone; sees

MYRA *watching him with concern.*

What's for dinner?

MYRA Salmon.

SIDNEY Again?

MYRA Yes. Sidney? Would you—actually *kill someone* to have another successful play?

SIDNEY (*thinks about it*) Don't be foolish, darling, of course I would. (*Toward upstage right*) Spoken in jest, Miss ten Dorp!

MYRA It's Mrs, she's divorced.

SIDNEY No wonder. Who could stay married to a woman with ESP?

The implication of this makes him uneasy; he picks up his drink and sips. MYRA studies him.

Well don't fix me with that basilisk stare, whatever a basilisk happens to be. Wouldn't *you* like to go into Sardi's again secure in the knowledge that we're not going to be seated in the kitchen? Do you know how much this play could net its author in today's market? Two million dollars, and that's not including the Deathtrap T-shirts. If that's not a reasonable motive for murder, I'd like to know what is. I wish you hadn't told me about her... (*He picks up the phone and dials again*) Ah, here we go. Hello. Is this Clifford Anderson? Sidney Bruhl. (*Covers the phone and mouths "Not the stammerer" at MYRA*) As a matter of fact I have. I finished it about fifteen minutes ago, and I must tell you in all sincerity that you've got an enormously promising first draft. I was just saying to my wife Myra that if you give it the reshaping it needs, point it up in the right places and work in some laughs, it'll be right up there with Sleuth and The Murder Game and Dial "M". It has the makings, as we say. I should think you would be. Oh, I know that feeling so well. I thought The Murder Game was finished the first time 'round, and then someone with much more experience in the theatre took it in hand and revised it with me; improved it tremendously, I don't mind admitting. George S. Kaufman. He didn't take credit, though God knows I urged him to, because he was badly in debt at the time and didn't want it known that he had a share of the royalties. But look, I could be quite wrong about this; what sort of reaction have you had from other

people? Oh? No one at all? (*Looks at MYRA and away*) That's very flattering. But surely someone has read it; your friends, your wife, some of the twer-uh, people who were at the seminar? Oh. I see. Hm. That sounds ideal: complete isolation, and all you have to do is check the thermostat and water the plants. I'm surprised you've written only *one* play since July; I'd have tossed off three or four by now.

MYRA, *uneasy, has withdrawn a bit.*

I am; a marvellous thriller. It's about a woman with ESP. Based on Helga ten Dorp; you know, the Dutch psychic? She's a neighbour of ours. (*Facing MYRA's disapproval*) It's called The Frowning Wife...but that's only a working title; I'll have to come up with something jazzier than that. I love Deathtrap, incidentally, the title as well as play. Or the promising first draft, I should say. Yes, I do; far too many of them to give you over the phone. Perhaps we can get together some time and go through the manuscript scene by scene. I'm free this evening, as a matter of fact; why don't you drive down? It's not very far. Oh. Hm. Well why don't you take the train down and I'll pick you up at the Westport station and run you over. It'll be better that way anyway. You'd have a devil of a time finding us; we're way off in the woods. Have to send up flares when we're expecting people. Do; I'll hold on. (*Covers the mouthpiece*) His car is in for repairs. He's house-sitting for a couple who are in Europe. Unmarried.

MYRA Do you think he'll be open to the idea of collaborating?

SIDNEY (*thinks-about several things*) Yes, I think he might... Was George S. Kaufman still alive when The Murder- (*Uncovers the mouthpiece*) Yes? That's a bit early; when's the next one? That's too late; let's make it the seven-twenty-nine. (*Jotting it down*) And there's an eleven-oh-something from New York that I'm sure stops at Milford; you won't have any problem at all about getting back home. Would you bring the original with you? The carbon's a bit hard on these weary old eyes. Good. I'll see you at seven-twenty-nine

then. Oh Terence? Do you mind if I call you Terence? Why? Oh God, I'm sorry; Clifford! Clifford. I may be a few minutes late, Clifford; I have some errands to run. So just wait by the station and I'll be along eventually. In a navy-blue Mercedes. Right. Goodbye. (*He hangs up, sips his drink*)

MYRA *is more than ever uneasy.*

I *think* he's the one without obvious defects...

MYRA What errands do you have to run?

SIDNEY Didn't you say something about library books? Picking them up or dropping them off?

MYRA No, I didn't.

SIDNEY Oh. I thought you did. (*Considers his drink a moment, and looks at MYRA again*) The Xerox machine has been fixed, but he decided to wait a day or two longer in case I had any small suggestions to make. No one else has read it. No one even knows he's been working on it.

MYRA And no one will see you picking him up...

SIDNEY The thought did cross my mind. I'm so in the habit of planning crimes on paper...

MYRA Why did you tell him to bring the original copy?

SIDNEY You heard me. The carbon *is* a strain, and we should have two copies to go through. I don't want him leaning over my shoulder for two hours, exhaling cheeseburger.

MYRA He probably has another carbon copy filed away somewhere.

SIDNEY More than likely. And all his notes and outlines, early drafts... Opening night of my dazzling triumph his grey-haired mother comes down the aisle accompanied by the Milford and Westport police departments...

The phone rings; SIDNEY takes it.

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.