

SIDNEY (*turning his desk chair to face PORTER and sitting*)

Besides, people would talk if I took in a female secretary, wouldn't they?

PORTER If she were under eighty.

SIDNEY That's what I thought. So I called Clifford.

PORTER I'm glad to see you looking so well. That's the main reason I've come. I was delegated, by Elizabeth and the Wessons and the Harveys. That young man has been discouraging all callers and we were afraid you might be in worse shape than he was letting on. But obviously that's not the case.

SIDNEY No. I'm not up to socialising yet but—I'm coming through. (*Touching the typewriter*) The work is a great solace to me...

PORTER What are you on to now?

SIDNEY A play about ESP. Helga ten Dorp is in the McBain cottage, you know.

PORTER Yes, I do. Tell me, is it true what everyone's saying, that—do you mind talking about this?

SIDNEY No, no, not at all. Go ahead.

PORTER Is it true she actually pointed to the spot on the floor where Myra was going to fall?

SIDNEY No, no, no, no, no, no, no; nothing like that, nothing at *all* like that. All she did was come in here and say, "There is pain, there is great pain. In this lady's chest." And Myra said, "There's *slight* pain," and she said, "Still, with your history you should see your doctor." Which is what I'd been telling Myra for days.

PORTER (*picking up his briefcase*) It's uncanny being able to sense things that way. I would think you'd be able to write a very fine thriller on the subject.

SIDNEY It's coming along.

PORTER *glances at his watch and starts opening his briefcase. SIDNEY smiles.*

Business time...

PORTER Yes. The first item on the agenda is your will. Now that Myra's gone you ought to look it over. As it stands, if anything should happen to you your cousins in Vancouver would inherit. Do you want to leave it that way? (*Takes a couple of sheets of typewritten paper from his briefcase*)

SIDNEY I don't know; I'll have to think about it.

PORTER Do. Don't put it off. And this is the second item. (*Hands him the papers*) It's only approximate, because I don't have up-to-date appraisals on the real estate yet, but that's roughly what you can anticipate, give or take a few thousand dollars.

SIDNEY (*looks over the pages, and is somewhat surprised*) I didn't know there was this much...

PORTER Then Myra must have been keeping a few secrets. *She* knew; her records were in apple-pie order.

SIDNEY How much of this is the government going to grab?

PORTER Not too much really. The first two hundred and fifty thousand of that is exempt from federal taxes, and the state tax, which starts at fifty thousand, is only a few per cent.

SIDNEY Hmm!

PORTER (*closing his briefcase*) There's one more point, Sidney. I was talking to Maury Escher at the Planning Board meeting last night, and he told me you spoke to him about selling off a few acres.

SIDNEY (*looking at the papers*) I'm not sure that I will now...

PORTER You can't; not yet, anyway. You'll have to wait till the will goes through probate.

SIDNEY I know that. I just asked him what he thought I could get.

PORTER Oh. Then *he* was jumping the gun, not you. I wanted to make sure you were clear on the point.

SIDNEY *folds the papers thoughtfully and puts them into the desk. PORTER looks at his watch.*

End of business. You've gotten off cheap.

SIDNEY (*turns, smiles*) Yes. I'm lucky.

PORTER *rises; SIDNEY does too.*

PORTER What's the procedure? You dictate and he types?

SIDNEY No, no, I do my own typing. I'll have him retype the finished product, of course. And he does the letters.

PORTER (*has paused by the desk*) Is that what he was doing before? Letters?

SIDNEY No, a play of his own.

PORTER Oh, the seminar; of course.

SIDNEY Started it yesterday and will probably finish it tomorrow.

He expects PORTER to move on, but PORTER stays studying the desk.

PORTER I hope he's not stealing your ESP idea... Have you discussed it with him?

SIDNEY (*looks at him for a moment*) What makes you say that?

PORTER He locked what he was working on into the drawer. Unobtrusively, but I noticed.

SIDNEY *looks at him for another moment, and frowning, goes to CLIFFORD's side of the desk. He tries the centre drawer; it's locked.*

SIDNEY Hm.

PORTER Then again, he might be afraid *you'll* steal *his* idea.

SIDNEY Hardly. Life at a welfare office: the dreams and frustrations of half a dozen people you'd just as soon not spend an evening with.

PORTER He's worked in a welfare office?

SIDNEY Yes, that's what he was doing. (*Tries the drawer again*)

PORTER It might only be force of habit then. People in large offices often lock their desks.

SIDNEY Unobtrusively? Just the reverse, I'd think. "Hey everybody, look, I'm locking my desk!"

PORTER It may simply be his way of doing things...

SIDNEY *drums uneasily at the desktop.*

I'm sorry if I've worried you. The suspicious legal mind. Probably he's exactly what he seems: an honest and helpful young man, completely trustworthy.

SIDNEY Yes. Probably.

PORTER Well, I'd better get moving if I'm going to be in New Haven by noon. (*He heads for the foyer*)

SIDNEY *pulls himself away from the desk and goes after him.*

Trustees luncheon at Old Eli...

PORTER *takes his coat from the rack; SIDNEY takes it and holds it for him.*

Thanks. Has the cheque from the insurance company come yet?

SIDNEY No, it hasn't.

PORTER I'll write them a letter first thing in the morning.

SIDNEY (*giving him his hat*) Thanks. I'd appreciate it.

PORTER Will you come have dinner with us?

SIDNEY In another week or two I think I'll be ready to face the world again. (*Opens the door*)

PORTER Good enough. Take care.

SIDNEY You too.

PORTER goes out.

Give my love to Elizabeth.

PORTER (offstage) I will.

SIDNEY And the girls! (He stands watching for a moment, and then he closes the door and turns. He comes slowly into the study and stands looking at CLIFFORD's side of the desk; picks up something on it, examines it, puts it down; drums on the desktop; frowns. He gets his keys out, chooses a likely one, and tries it; it won't go in. He chooses another and tries again, more carefully; same result. He pockets the keys, frowning—and then smiles. Going up around the desk, he takes the key from the drawer on his side and continues down and around to CLIFFORD's side. He puts the key in; it won't turn.) Shit. (He tries again, without luck. Taking the key out, he goes back to his side and replaces it; thinks a second and moves upstage to the wall of weapons. He takes down a flat-bladed stiletto; back to the desk. Sitting in CLIFFORD's chair, he sets to work with the stiletto; inserts it above the drawer and pokes and levers) Come on, you bastard... Goddamned old-world craftsmen... (He keeps trying, but it's no use. Defeated, he gets up and puts the stiletto back in its place; looks at the desk and is inspired. Going quickly to his side of it, he moves the chair away, takes out the centre drawer, and puts it down across the chair arms. Getting down on his knees, he peers into the drawer opening, then thrusts his arm into it and reaches as far as he can. He switches arms and tries harder, sweating a bit but apparently near success) Ah, ah, ah, ah—ooh, ooh, ooh, ooh! (It would seem his fingers are caught) Oh my God! Oh Jesus Christmas! (Now he's really sweating, glancing at the door and wincing and straining as he tries to extricate his arm from the desk's maw. After considerable effort he manages to do so. Sucking his injured fingers, he stands up, kicks the desk, examines his fingers,

wipes them under his arm; picks up the drawer and fits it back into the desk, slams it home with a vengeance. He hears something; hurries to the front door and jumps up to look through the fanlight, then hurries back into the study; anguishes over the desk in last-ditch frustration) Faeces! (But then he runs to the french doors, unbolts and opens them a bit; runs back to his side of the desk, opens a drawer and takes out a manilla folder; opens another drawer and takes out a dozen or so sheets of typing paper)

He shoves the paper into the folder, puts it down, closes the drawers, partly covers the folder with a loose piece of paper as CLIFFORD unlocks the front door and comes in with a bag of groceries.

That was quick!

CLIFFORD I only went to Gibson's.

He closes the door. SIDNEY goes briskly and cheerfully to him.

SIDNEY Here, give me; I'll put them away.

CLIFFORD It's all right, I don't mind.

SIDNEY (taking the bag) No, no, come on, you shopped, I'll put away. Get back to the welfare office.

CLIFFORD God forbid.

SIDNEY goes off right.

CLIFFORD takes bills and coins from his jacket pocket, puts them down.

The change is in the bowl. (Takes his jacket off, hangs it on the rack; looks off right) The avocado is supposed to be organic.

SIDNEY says something unintelligible but affirmative-sounding.

The hand clutching his throat stops him; it pulls him backward and CLIFFORD comes up from behind the chair, stabbing again and again into SIDNEY's chest with the crossbow bolt. CLIFFORD stops stabbing and hauls himself erect, glassy-eyed, the bolt in his hand, his chest bloody. He crumples to the floor. SIDNEY, his hands to his own bloody chest, gasps and twitches and dies.

Thunder and—.

Blackout.

Scene Three

The lights come up. The draperies are open; it's an overcast afternoon. The axe, the crossbow, and SIDNEY's jacket are gone, as well as the two bodies. The fireplace is empty. Otherwise everything is as it was.

HELGA, in mid-trance, stands by the chair where MYRA died. PORTER stands nearby, watching HELGA intently.

HELGA They kill Mrs Bruhl.

PORTER What? She died of a heart attack!

HELGA They...make it to happen. *(Holding the chair with both hands, eyes closed)* Pain she feels—is that she sees Bruhl kill boy.

PORTER Now hold on a minute; the boy didn't—

HELGA *(interrupting him)* Quiet! *(Stays in her trance)* Bruhl shows her play from boy, good play. Boy comes, Bruhl kills—around neck, tight—to take play. She helps him carry boy out. Pain brings *me*, but now I am gone—and boy is from grave! Comes with log! No! No! Please! I tried to stop—EIIII! *(Winces and lets out breath)* She dies. *(Comes out of the trance, blinks)*

PORTER My God! A fake murder to bring about a real one! Are you sure that's what happened?

HELGA *nods, leaves the chair, is drawn to the desk.*

I thought it was strange, the boy stepping in on such short notice...

HELGA *(at CLIFFORD's side of the desk)* Was no play...

PORTER There wasn't?

HELGA But now boy writes it... All they have done... *(Moving to SIDNEY's side)* Bruhl discovers...

PORTER I saw the boy locking his drawer!

HELGA Is afraid, Bruhl. Play will bring shame.

PORTER A play about *them*? Killing Myra?

HELGA *nods*.

I'll bet he was afraid!

HELGA Pretends to help, but...*tricks boy to take axe...for play... and-shoots with gun? Ja, but is no bullet! Boy has tricked him, to use to make more of play! Chains him, will go! But chains come apart!*

PORTER The Houdini set!

HELGA Shoots boy with arrow! On stairs!

PORTER And drags him in and puts him by the axe!

HELGA Burns play...

PORTER The ashes in the fireplace!

HELGA (*her hand on SIDNEY's chair*) Calls police.

PORTER And while he was speaking—

HELGA Boy pulls arrow from chest and— (*A stabbing gesture*)
—*attacks*. Just as I saw four weeks ago... (*Draws a deep, spent breath*)

PORTER My God, what a story! It's—it's better than *The Murder Game!* (*A thought strikes him; he ponders it, moving near CLIFFORD's chair*)

HELGA *looks across the desk at him*.

HELGA You are thinking—it could be play?

PORTER It has the *feel* of one, doesn't it? (*Looks around*)
Everything happening in the one room... (*Thinks, finger-counts*) Five characters...

HELGA (*looks into the distance*) Deathtrap... Porter Say, *that's a* catchy title. (*Thinks, wonders*) I couldn't write Frankfurter... but maybe I could write Deathtrap...

HELGA Ja, ja, I see theatre! Inside, much applause! Outside, long line of ticket-buyers, shivering in cold!

PORTER My goodness, that's encouraging!

HELGA (*turns to him*) But— (*taps her chest*) —is my idea.

PORTER Your idea? How can you say that? It's—it was *Sidney's* idea, and the boy's! They lived it!

HELGA But if I not tell, you not know.

PORTER (*considers the point*) That's true; I can't deny that. And you've supplied me with a title—which I may or may not use...

HELGA We share money half and half.

PORTER Are you serious? I'm going to go home and work nights and weekends, for months, maybe even give up my vacation. All you've done is come in here and touch the furniture for two minutes. *If I do in fact—*

HELGA (*interrupting him*) If you not share money—I tell about telephone.

PORTER Telephone?

HELGA (*looking into the distance again*) You speak through handkerchief, in high voice. Say dirty words to all your friends.

PORTER *blanches*.

(*turning to him*) For shame, a man like you, important lawyer with wife and two daughters—no, three daughters—to make such telephon-ings! Tsk tsk, tsk, tsk!

PORTER (*starts menacingly toward her*) You interfering busybody...

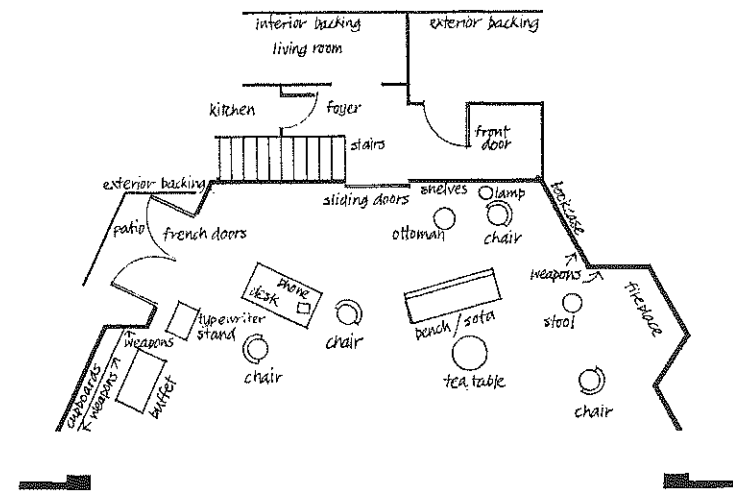
HELGA *runs to the wall; grabs up and brandishes the dagger*.

HELGA }
 PORTER } (together) { Be careful, knife is sharp. Amsterdam
 police have taught me self-defence. I
 warn you I am strong and unafraid!
 Bitch! Whore! Foreign slut! Dutch
 pervert!

They circle the desk as—.

The curtain falls.

FURNITURE AND PROPERTY LIST



ACT I

Scene One

Only essential pieces are listed. Further dressing may be added at the director's discretion

On stage: Bench/sofa

Three easy chairs. *On one:* Myra's glasses with case, needlework, needle and cotton, needlework bag

Ottoman

Tea table

Occasional table left. *On it:* table lamp (practical)

Occasional table right. *On it:* table lamp (practical)

Standard lamp (practical)

Bar/buffet. *On it:* Two decanters, bottles of brandy, Scotch, whisky, four brandy glasses, four small glasses, bottles of ginger ale, ice-tongs

Stool

Small filing cabinet

Typewriter stand

Sidney's desk with centre drawer lock (practical).

On it: desk lamp, telephone, reference books,