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The doorbell chimes. Clifford starts to rise but Sidney puts up a hand.

SIDNEY. Don't. We don't want to break the flow, do we?

He heads for the foyer. Clifford resumes typing. Sidney opens the front door. Porter Milgrim is there, a man of substance in his mid-fifties; in hat, topcoat, and business suit, carrying a briefcase.

Porter! It's good to see you! Come on in.

They shake hands.

PORTER. How are you, Sidney?

SIDNEY. Doing fairly well, thanks.

PORTER. (*Entering the foyer.*) There are a couple of things I want to talk to you about. Am I disturbing you?

SIDNEY. (*Closing the door.*) Not at all. Glad of the chance to take a break.

Porter has put his briefcase down and is taking his hat and coat off.

How come you're not in the city?

PORTER. I have to be in New Haven this afternoon. The secretary?

SIDNEY. (*Taking the hat and coat.*) Yes.

PORTER. My, what a fast typist...

He picks up his briefcase while Sidney hangs the hat and coat on a wall rack.

SIDNEY. He is, isn't he. Come meet him. Clifford?

Clifford stops typing; turns and rises as Porter and Sidney come into the study.

This is Clifford Anderson. And this is my friend Porter Milgrim.

PORTER. (*Shaking hands with Clifford.*) How do you do.

CLIFFORD. How do you do, sir.

SIDNEY. I would say "my attorney," but then he would bill me.

PORTER. I'm going to anyway; this is a business call. Partly, at least.

SIDNEY. Clifford was at the seminar I conducted last July. He asked me then about a secretarial position, and--when Myra passed on--I realized I would need someone to lend a hand, so I called him. The next day, here he was.

CLIFFORD. Have typewriter, will travel.

PORTER. That was very good of you.

CLIFFORD. It's a privilege to be of help to someone like Mr. Bruhl.

PORTER. (*Noticing the desk.*) Oh, look at that... Isn't this a beauty!

SIDNEY. Partners' desk.

PORTER. Mmmm! Where did you find it?

SIDNEY. In Wilton. Just happened on it last week. Makes more sense than cluttering the room with two single ones.

PORTER. Cost a pretty penny, I'll bet.

SIDNEY. Well, it's deductible.

PORTER. Yes, they can't very well quibble about a writer's desk, can they? Wait till Elizabeth sees this...

SIDNEY. How is she?

PORTER. Fine.

SIDNEY. And the girls?

PORTER. Couldn't be better. Cathy loves Vassar.

SIDNEY. And Vassar versa, I'm sure. Sit down.

CLIFFORD. Shall I go get the groceries now? Then you and Mr. Milgrim can talk in private.

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 D. R. and puts his briefcase down.

I love this room.

CLIFFORD. Isn't it nice? It's a pleasure working here.

Clifford 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.*) 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?

Scene 2

When the lights come up, Clifford, in a different shirt, is standing at his side of the desk squaring up a sizable thickness of paper and looking pleased with himself. Sidney's typewriter is covered, Clifford's isn't. The room is quite dark; the desk lamp and a light outside the front door fan-light are the only illumination. Wind can be heard. Through the darkness outside the closed French doors a flashlight approaches; the person holding it raps at the doors. Clifford starts. He puts the papers down and, as the person raps again, goes warily toward the doors.

HELGA. (*Shining the flashlight onto her face.*) Mr. Bruhl? Is I, Helga ten Dorp!

Clifford turns a lamp on at R. and goes and unbolts the French doors and opens them.

CLIFFORD. Come in. Mr. Bruhl isn't here now.

HELGA. (*Coming in, in a raincoat and kerchief.*) I come through wood; is less to walk.

CLIFFORD. (*Closing the doors.*) He should be back any minute.

HELGA. You are?

CLIFFORD. His secretary, Clifford Anderson.

HELGA. (*Offers her hand.*) I am Helga ten Dorp. I am psychic.

CLIFFORD. (*Shaking her hand.*) I know, Mr. Bruhl's told me about you. I understand you predicted his wife's death.

HELGA. (*Coming into the room, pocketing her flashlight.*) Ja, ja, was much pain. Right here. (*Pats her chest.*) Very sad. Such a nice lady. Ei, this room... He is well, Mr. Bruhl?

CLIFFORD. Yes, fine. He went out to dinner, the first time since... He said he'd be back by ten and it's about a quarter past now.

HELGA. Will be big storm! Much wind and rain, lightning and thunder. Trees will fall.

CLIFFORD. Are you sure?

HELGA. Ja, was on radio. (*Takes her kerchief off.*) I come to borrow candles. Are none in house. You have?

CLIFFORD. I don't know. I haven't noticed any but there must be some; I'll go look. Why don't you sit down?

HELGA. Thank you.

Clifford starts for the foyer. Helga starts to sit but rises, pointing.
You wear boots!

Clifford stops, and after a moment turns.

CLIFFORD. Everyone does these days. They're very comfortable.

HELGA. You are for long time secretary to Mr. Bruhl?

CLIFFORD. No. I just came here—about three weeks ago. After Mrs. Bruhl died.

Helga turns from him, worried and perplexed.
I'll go look for—

He is interrupted by the unlocking and opening of the front door. Sidney comes in, switching the foyer light on and the outside light off. He's in a trenchcoat over a shirt, tie, and jacket. As he closes the door:

SIDNEY. Hi. What a bore that—

CLIFFORD. (*Interrupting him.*) Mr. Bruhl! Hello. Mrs. ten Dorp is here.

He and Sidney exchange a look.

SIDNEY. Oh.

He comes to the doorway, smiling.

Hello.

HELGA. (*Going toward him.*) Good evening, Mr. Bruhl.

SIDNEY. (*Meeting her, shaking her hand.*) How are you?

HELGA. Well.

SIDNEY. Did you get my note?

HELGA. Ja, thank you.

SIDNEY. (*Taking his coat off.*) Yours was most kind. And the flowers...

CLIFFORD. Do we have any candles? There's a storm coming up and Mrs. ten Dorp wants to borrow some.

ACT II

Scene 1

At rise, Clifford is hard at work and Sidney isn't. They sit facing each other at c. s. across a handsome old partners' desk, Sidney at its R. side, Clifford at its L. The Act I desk is gone. The draperies are open to bright morning sunlight.

Clifford, typing away like sixty on an old black Smith Corona, is in chinos, a shirt, and boots. Sidney, lolling in his chair and feigning unconcern, is in his cardigan and another turtleneck. There's a sheet of paper in Zenobia, but it's probably blank.

God, how Clifford types! On and on, speech after speech. Occasionally he backtracks to X out a few words, occasionally he pauses for an instant of intense thought; but then it's on and on, fast and expert and clattering. Sidney finds it harder and harder to hide his irritation. He squirms, frets, grits his teeth. Eventually he pecks out a word, mouthing the letters—S, H, I, T—and sits back and glares at it.

Clifford whips out the finished page, scans it, puts it down on a Manila folder beside him and begins revising with a pen.

SIDNEY. That must have been quite a welfare office...

CLIFFORD. It was. Everyone had a poignant story. They're creating the play of their own accord.

SIDNEY. No notes? No outline?

CLIFFORD. This isn't a thriller, Sidney. It's not dependent on intricate plotting and contrived theatrics. These are real people. All I'm doing is bringing them on and letting them spill out their dreams and frustrations, their anger at the bureaucracy.

SIDNEY. Joe Papp will have a messenger at the door any minute.

CLIFFORD. I was thinking of him as a possible producer. Do you know him?

SIDNEY. Slightly. Let me see a few pages.

CLIFFORD. Sure, if you'd like to. But I'd really rather wait till the draft is done, give you the whole thing in one glorious bundle. Would you mind?

SIDNEY. Of course not. What's another hour or so?

CLIFFORD. *(Putting a fresh sheet of paper into his typewriter.)* It's going to take three or four weeks, I think.

SIDNEY. At the rate you're going you'll have a trilogy by then.

CLIFFORD. *(Looks sympathetically at him.)* Nothing doing?

SIDNEY. I'm thinking...

CLIFFORD. Why don't you invite her over? Ten Dorp. Talking with her might spark something.

SIDNEY. Do you think we should risk having her on the premises?

CLIFFORD. Maybe not when the moon is full, but any other time, why not? Look at the egg she laid on the *Griffin Show*.

SIDNEY. Well, she got rattled by the Amazing Kreskin when he described all her husbands in such detail.

CLIFFORD. Oh, Belle Forrester called before you came down. *(Resumes typing.)* Wanted to know if she could bring over a casserole or come sew a button. I told her we were managing just fine.

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Scene 2

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 Manila 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 Master's 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, touches the dagger blade.

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

CLIFFORD. (*Moves 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 points at a window card.

CLIFFORD. 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 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 dialed "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 prowls 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 center 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.