

forward and feels at a wrist within its handcuff. Myra sits L., weeping, moaning.

Sidney gets up, breathing hard, trembling a little. He gets out his handkerchief, wipes his hands and his face, looks at Myra. He rights the chair, picks up the lamp, puts it in its place and straightens its shade—not very successfully because his hands are shaking badly now. He holds them a moment, then turns to the desk, picks up a key, and crouching beside Clifford unlocks and removes the handcuffs. He rises, wiping the cuffs with the handkerchief, and goes and replaces them on the wall, then returns to Clifford's body. Myra is staring at him.

SIDNEY. Right on the rug. One point for neatness.

He crouches again and unwinds the garrote from Clifford's throat, then turns the ends of the hearth-rug over Clifford's body. Rising, he wipes the garrote with the handkerchief and meets Myra's wondering stare.

Your heart seems to have taken it.

MYRA. *(Keeps staring at him awhile.)* Barely.

SIDNEY. *(Looks away, wipes at the garrote.)* We'll give it a rest on the Riviera, after the opening. And we'll have a housekeeper again, so you can take things easy. Another car too, a goddamn Rolls.

Sidney looks at the blood-streaked handkerchief, wipes the garrote more.

MYRA. We're going to be in prison!

Sidney throws the handkerchief into the fireplace and heads U.

SIDNEY. A young would-be playwright walks away from his house-sitting job. The police won't even bother to yawn.

He puts the garrote in its place.

MYRA. Leaving his clothes? And his typewriter?

SIDNEY. Why not? Who can figure these young people nowadays? *(Going back D.)* Especially the would-be writers. Maybe he realized he wouldn't be—*(Picking up the envelope and the bound manuscript.)*—and went off to preach ecology. *(Going back behind the desk.)* Or to join the Reverend Sun Myung Moon.

He puts the envelope and manuscript down, opens the manuscript.

Who knows, the place might be broken into, and poor little Smith Corona stolen.

Sidney tears out the first page and puts it aside; unfastens the envelope and takes out the two unbound manuscripts; removes their first pages.

MYRA. What are you—going to do with him?

SIDNEY. (*Examining other papers that were in the envelope.*) Bury him. Behind the garage. No, in the vegetable patch; easier digging.

He examines the last scraps of paper and puts them down; opens the desk's center drawer and puts the three manuscripts into it; closes and locks it. Myra puts her face into her hands, overcome by grief and shock again. Sidney gathers the papers and loose pages, the envelope, the letter that came with the play.

Take a brandy or something...

He goes to the fireplace and, crouching by Clifford's body, tosses everything in; takes a match from a holder, strikes it, and sets the papers afire. He tosses the match in, rises, watches, then moves away and faces Myra, who is studying him.

I'm going to be a winner again! All our dear friends are going to see *you* living on my money! Picture their confusion.

Myra looks into her lap. Sidney goes and throws open the draperies, unbolts and opens the French doors. He looks toward the treetops.

Full moon all right...

He comes back to the hearth and, crouching, rearranges Clifford's body for carrying.

I hope this isn't going to become a monthly practice...

He straightens up, takes his jacket off and puts it on a chair, rubs his hands and readies himself; meets Myra's gaze.

Would you mind helping me carry him?

Myra looks at him for a moment, and looks away.

It's been *done*, Myra. I don't see the point in my getting a hernia.

Myra looks at him and after a moment rises and comes over. The lights begin dimming as Sidney lifts Clifford's rug-wrapped shoulders. Myra lifts his feet. They heft him up between them and carry him toward the French doors, Sidney going backwards.

Thank God he wasn't the fat one.

The lights fade to darkness.

DEATHTRAP

ACT I

Scene 1

At rise, Sidney Bruhl is seated thoughtfully at his desk. He's about fifty, an impressive and well-tended man, wearing a cardigan sweater over a turtleneck shirt.

The typewriter is covered. The draperies are open at the French doors; it's late afternoon of a sunny day in October of 1978.

The door to the foyer opens partway and Myra Bruhl looks in. She's in her forties, slim and self-effacing, in a sweater and skirt. She enters quietly with 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.

He 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?

MORA. 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 the twerps at the seminar.

He 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.

He 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.

Sidney 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—or Michael Caine.

MYRA. Oh, I love him.

SIDNEY. The damn thing is perfect.

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

Sidney 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 percent. Maybe one and a half.

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 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 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.