

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

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 3

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 dies. 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!

Helga winces, and lets out a breath.

She dies.

She 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...

She 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.

Porter thinks, wonders.

I couldn't write *Frankfurter*...but maybe I could write *Deathtrap*...

HELGA. Ja, ja, I see theater! 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. Helga turns to him.

For shame, a man like you, important lawyer with wife and two daughters—no, three daughters—to make such telephonings! Tsk tsk, tsk, tsk, tsk!

Porter starts menacingly toward her.

PORTER. You interfering busybody...

Helga runs to the wall; grabs up and brandishes the dagger.

HELGA. Be careful, knife is sharp. Amsterdam police have taught me self-defense. I warn you, I am strong and unafraid!

PORTER. (*Simultaneously.*) Bitch! Whore! Foreign slut. Dutch pervert!

The curtain falls as they circle the desk.

End of Play