

Sidney/Myra **pg 1**

SIDNEY. *Deathtrap*. A thriller in two acts. One set, five characters. A juicy murder in Act One, unexpected developments in Act Two. Sound construction, good dialogue, laughs in the right places. Highly commercial.

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--Clifford Anderson. He was one of 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. 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.

MYRA. Is it really that good? His first play?

SIDNEY. It can't miss. A gifted director couldn't even hurt it. 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.

Sidney/Myra **pg 2**

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...

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.

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?

Sidney Mono

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... Ah, here we go. Hello. Is this Clifford Anderson? Sidney Bruhl.

He 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 theater 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.

I am; a marvelous thriller. It's about a woman with ESP. Based on Helga ten Dorp; you know, the Dutch psychic? She's a neighbor 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.

Sidney/Clifford/Myra **pg 1**

SIDNEY. You don't have another carbon?

CLIFFORD. I only made the one. I thought I'd be Xeroxing the original as soon as I was through.

SIDNEY. Of course. There's no need for two or three anymore in the age of Xerox...

CLIFFORD. She could read this one, and we could pass the pages back and forth. Or I could sit next to you.

SIDNEY. Wait, let me think. I want to think for a moment.

Sidney thinks-hard. Myra tries to contain her growing anxiety but can't.

MYRA. Mr. Anderson, Sidney is bursting with creative ideas about your play! I've never seen him so enthusiastic! He gets plays in the mail very often, finished plays that are ready for production supposedly; from his agent, from producers, from aspiring playwrights, and usually he just laughs and sneers and says the most disparaging things you could possibly imagine! I know he could improve your play tremendously! He could turn it into a hit that would run for years and years and make more than enough money for everyone concerned!

She stops. Clifford stares. Sidney studies her.

SIDNEY. Is that what you meant by "I'll be quiet"?

MYRA. *(Putting her needlework aside.)* I won't be quiet. I'm going to say something that's been on my mind ever since your phone conversation. *(Rising, advancing on Clifford.)* It's very wrong of you to expect Sidney to give you the fruit of his years of experience, his hard-won knowledge, without any quid pro quo, as if the seminar were still in session!

CLIFFORD. He *offered* to give me...

Sidney/Clifford/Myra **pg 2**

MYRA. (*Turning on Sidney.*) And it's very wrong of *you* to have offered to give it to him! I am the one in this household whose feet are on the ground and, whose eye is on the checkbook! Now, I'm going to make a suggestion to you, Sidney. It's going to come as a shock to you, but I want you to give it your grave and thoughtful and earnest consideration. Will you do that? Will you promise to do that for me?

Sidney, staring, nods.

Put aside the play you're working on. Yes, put aside the play about Helga ten Dorp and how she finds murderers, and keys under clothes dryers; put it aside, Sidney, and help Mr. Anderson with *his* play. Collaborate with him. *That's* what I'm suggesting. *That's* what I think is the fair and sensible and *rational* thing to do in this situation. *Deathtrap*, by Clifford Anderson and Sidney Bruhl. Unless Mr. Anderson feels that, in deference to your age and reputation, it should be the other way around.

SIDNEY. Hm. That is a shocker... Put aside—*The Drowning Wife*?

CLIFFORD. I thought it was "frowning."

SIDNEY *Frowning?* No. What kind of title would that be? *The Drowning Wife* is what I'm calling it, at the moment. It has these Women's Lib overtones, plus the ESP... (*Looking doubtfully at Myra.*) It's such a timely play...

MYRA. *It will keep*, Sidney. People are always interested in psychics who can point at someone (*Points to him.*) and say— (*Swings her finger to Clifford.*) "This man-murdered that man." (*Pointing at Sidney again; lowers her hand.*) Put it aside. Please. Do for Mr. Anderson—what George S. Kaufman did for you.

SIDNEY. (*Gives her a look, then thinks.*) That's awfully persuasive, Myra... (*To Clifford.*) How does it grab *you*?

CLIFFORD. Oh wow.

Clifford/Sidney (Myra 1 line) pg 1

CLIFFORD. Do you know, this could be a good thriller! It could! I mean it!

SIDNEY. How so?

CLIFFORD. Well...a young playwright sends his first play to an older playwright who conducted a seminar that the young playwright attended. Nobody else has read it, and then he comes to *visit* the older playwright, to *get some ideas for rewrites*, and he brings along the original and all his notes and everything. Of course, you'd have to have the Xerox breaking down, to explain why there are only the two copies, and the play would have to be a very good one—the one the young playwright wrote, I mean—and the older playwright would have to have nothing much going for him at the time...

SIDNEY. An enormous concatenation of unlikely circumstances, don't you think?

CLIFFORD. Yes, maybe... But we've almost got it here, haven't we? The only difference is that you've got *The Drowning Wife* and the Houdini play, and *Deathtrap* probably isn't worth killing for. I'll bet nobody even saw me getting into your car...

SIDNEY. Well, there you are: You've licked the second-play problem.

CLIFFORD. I think it could be turned into something fairly interesting... What do you think, Mrs. Bruhl?

MYRA. I-don't like it. It frightens me.

SIDNEY. (*Turning to the weapons on the wall.*) I wonder if I could have put it up here somewhere...

Clifford looks curiously at Myra, and at Sidney nervously touching the various weapons, and at his handcuffed wrists. He thinks a bit. And a bit more. And a lot more. He thinks very hard.

CLIFFORD. Oh, I forgot to mention, I should be getting a phone call any minute now. There's a girl who's coming to see me at eight-thirty—that's around what it is now, isn't it?—and I couldn't reach her before I left, so I left a note on the hall mirror telling her where I am and giving the number, (*Rising and heading DL*) so she can call and find out what train I'll be taking back. So, she can pick me up at the station. One two-hour walk per day is just about enough for me. (*Turns and smiles.*) So, I hope you find the key soon or else you're going to have to hold the phone for me.

Clifford/Sidney (Myra 1 line) pg 2

SIDNEY. How is she going to get in to *read* the note?

CLIFFORD. She has a key.

SIDNEY. You're not a very conscientious house-sitter.

CLIFFORD. She's honest,

SIDNEY. You said in the car that you don't know anyone in Milford except a few tradespeople.

CLIFFORD. She's from Hartford. Her name is Marietta Klenofski and she teaches at Quirk Middle School. Phys Ed.

SIDNEY. Where did you get the number? It's not listed.

CLIFFORD. They gave it to me at the university, along with your address. I'm friendly with Mrs. Beecham there.

SIDNEY. Beecham?

CLIFFORD. The short red-haired lady. With the eyeshade.

SIDNEY. I hope she gave you the right number. I had it changed a few weeks ago—an obscene caller was boring us—and I didn't notify old U. of Conn. What number did you leave for Ms. Klenofski?

CLIFFORD. I don't remember it.

SIDNEY. Two-two-six, three-oh-four-nine? Or two-two-six, five four-five-seven?

CLIFFORD. The first one. Three-oh-four-nine.

SIDNEY. The new number. Hm. I must have notified the university and clean forgot about it. How strange, and how untypical of me.

CLIFFORD. Would you go on looking for the key, please?

SIDNEY. Certainly.

Clifford/Sidney pg 1

CLIFFORD. (*Pocketing the handkerchief.*) I'd better get my things in.

SIDNEY. (*Opening a bottom drawer.*) No rush. I'm not going to call the doctor for a few minutes yet. We don't want them working any miracles of resuscitation, do we?

CLIFFORD. What if Madam ten Dorp comes back?

SIDNEY. (*Replacing the garrote on the wall with one similar to it.*) I can't think why she should. The pain has stopped, hasn't it?

CLIFFORD. Yes. I hadn't thought of that.

SIDNEY. (*Putting the garrote from the wall into the drawer.*) Don't move around too much; you're shedding dirt. *He opens another drawer, takes out the dagger.* I'll bet you were glad to hear my "Exit dagger" line.

CLIFFORD. Was that for my benefit?

SIDNEY. (*Putting the dagger in its place.*) Of course. I was going to suggest putting it away myself if she didn't. I was afraid the prediction might have made you uneasy. (*Unlocking the center drawer.*) I had visions of you haring off into the woods, leaving me with a live wife, an imaginary corpse, (*Taking out the manuscripts.*) and no surefire can't-miss thriller to justify the one to the other.

CLIFFORD. I'd never have done that.

SIDNEY. (*Heading for the fireplace with the manuscripts.*) Well, I just thought I'd relieve any possible anxiety. (*Stops.*) I don't think I'd better burn these now. It'll take too long

CLIFFORD. Why burn them at all? They're just old manuscripts.

SIDNEY. True. We could cut them up and use the backs for scrap. That's so chintzy though. Oh, what the hell.

Sidney throws the manuscripts in the fireplace

I'll say I was cleaning out my files when the Grim Reaper struck. (*Strikes the match.*)

CLIFFORD. The closer you can stay to the truth, the better off you are.

SIDNEY. (*Lighting a corner.*) You're a fount of homey wisdom, Cliffy-boy. (*Lights another corner.*) Farewell, *Deathtrap*. Would that you were the genuine article...

Clifford/Sidney pg 2

CLIFFORD. We can put my desk right here.

SIDNEY. (*Tossing the match in, rising and turning.*) No, I have a surprise for you.

CLIFFORD. Let me guess. I work in the maid's room.

SIDNEY. Would I do that to you? You're working right here in the handsomely converted stable, as promised.

CLIFFORD. Then what's the surprise?

SIDNEY. You'll see, after the obsequies. (*Moving to the front of the desk.*) I hope you won't mind Zenobia tearing along at full speed. I really am going to try something on ESP. That was an awfully impressive demonstration she gave, despite the mistakes,

CLIFFORD. I'm ready to get to work too.

SIDNEY. The thing you mentioned at the seminar?

CLIFFORD. No, I've got a better idea... Last week, while I was cleaning out my desk, I suddenly realized that there's a play *there*, in a typical urban welfare office.

SIDNEY. A thriller?

CLIFFORD. No. The truth is, I've begun to lose interest in thrillers. I want to try something-more honest, more relevant.

SIDNEY. (*Reaching into his pocket.*) Even though you used those words I'm going to let you stay here. (*Giving car keys to Clifford.*) Go get your things; I'll call the doctor now.

CLIFFORD. Right.

SIDNEY. Coming! Who is it?

HELGA. *(Off.)* I am your neighbor in house of McBains. Please, will you let me come in?

Sidney turns, wide-eyed. Myra too is startled and frightened.

Is most urgent I speak to you. I call the information but the lady will tell me not your number. Please, will you let me come in? I am friend of Paul Wyman. Is most urgent!

SIDNEY. *(Opening the door.)* Come in.

HELGA. I apologize for so late I come but you will forgive when I make the explaining. a, ja, is room I see. Beams, and window like so... *(Holds her forehead wincing.)* And the pain! Such pain!

Helga sees Myra and recognizes her as the source of it; approaches her

Pain. Pain. Pain. Pain...

She moves her hands about Myra, as if wanting to touch and comfort her but unable to.

Pain. Pain. Pain!

SIDNEY: We're neither of us up to snuff today...

Helga turns, sees the weapons.

HELGA. Ei! Just as I see them! *Uuuch!* Why keep you such pain covered things?

SIDNEY. They're antiques, and souvenirs from plays. I'm a playwright.

HELGA. Ja, Sidney Bruhl; Paul Wyman tells me. We make together book.

SIDNEY. My wife, Myra...

MYRA. How do you do...

HELGA. What gives you such pain, dear lady?

MYRA. Nothing. I'm-fine, really.

HELGA. No, no; something you see pains you. *(To both of them.)* Paul tells you of me? I am Helga ten Dorp. I am psychic.

SIDNEY. Yes, he did. In fact we were going to ask

Helga/Sidney/Myra pg 2

HELGA. (*Interrupting him*) For hours now I feel the pain from here. And more than pain. Since eight-thirty, when begins the Mery Griffin Show. I am on it next week; you will watch?

SIDNEY. Yes, yes, certainly. Make a note of that, Myra.

HELGA. Thursday night. The Amazing Kreskin also. What they want *him* for, I do not know. I call the information but the lady will tell me not your number. I call Paul but he is not at home; he is in place with red walls, eating with chopsticks. I call the information again. I say, "Is urgent, you *must* tell me number; I am Helga ten Dorp, I am psychic." She say, "*Guess* number." I try, but only I see the two-two-six, which is everybody, ja? So I come here now. (*Looking sympathetically at Myra.*) Because pain gets worse. And more than pain...

*She moves away and wanders the room, a hand to her forehead.
Sidney and Myra look anxiously at each other.*

MYRA. More than pain?

HELGA. Ja, is something else here, something frightening. No, it will interfere,

SIDNEY. What will?

HELGA. The drink you would give me. Must keep unclouded the head. Never drink. Only when images become too many. Then I get drunk.

Porter/Sidney pg 1

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 socializing 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 the 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?

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. 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 percent,

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. 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?