

Side ONE – Sidney, Myra

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. La

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. S?

MYRA. *(Going to him.)* Ah, my poor Sidney... *(Hugs him, kisses his cheek.)* I

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. I

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.

Myra rises, goes to the buffet, puts her glass down and turns.

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MYRA. In a month or so, if we haven't been arrested, I want you to leave. We'll have a few arguments in people's living rooms—you can write them for us, little tiffs about money or something—and then you'll move out. I wish you could take the vegetable patch with you, but since you can't, you'll buy it from me, as soon as the money starts rolling in. Before the Rolls-Royce and before you go to the Riviera!

Sidney, concerned, rises and starts toward her; she's growing more distraught.

You'll buy the vegetable patch, and the house, and the whole nine-point-three acres! We'll get Buck Raymond or Maury Escher to set a fair price!

She turns and moves away, near tears, as Sidney reaches for her.

SIDNEY. Darling, you've had a shocking and—

MYRA. Get away from me!

SIDNEY. You've had a shocking and painful experience and so have I. I'm terrified that I'll be caught and absolutely guilt-ridden about having been insane enough to do it. I'm going to give half the money to the New Dramatists League, I swear I am! This isn't the time to talk about *anything*. In a few days, when we're both ourselves again, things will look much cheerier.

MYRA. You *are* yourself, right now. And so am I. In a few days—

S — *The doorbell chime stops her. Sidney freezes. Myra points toward the door.*

Go ahead. "He wrote me a twerpy letter, Officer."

SIDNEY. It must be Lottie and Ralph, come to yammer about the movie...

MYRA. *(Wiping her cheeks.)* It's probably Helga ten Dorp.

SIDNEY. Don't be silly.

S — *The doorbell chimes again.*

LW. It's Lottie and Ralph, damn them. We've got to let them in; can you face them? Maybe you'd better go upstairs; I'll tell them you—

Side TWO – Sidney, Clifford, Myra

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? A

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.

was going to bash poor Teddy. You didn't leave any room for doubt. I mean, the audience should suspect, yes, but they shouldn't be absolutely certain, should they? Doesn't that tend to diminish the suspense?

SIDNEY. Hmm... You may have a point there... I wish you had mentioned on the phone that you wanted Myra to read it. I'd have told you to bring another carbon, and she could be reading right now while we have our talk.

CLIFFORD. I didn't know she'd be interested, and anyway I don't have one.

Myra is sitting forward again.

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...

His eyes meet Myra's and glance away. Clifford gestures with his manuscript toward Myra.

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

Side THREE – Sidney, Myra, Helga

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. *(Interrupting him.)* For hours now I feel the pain from here. And more than pain. Since eight-thirty, when begins the *Merv 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.

She goes close to the weapons, one hand to her forehead, the other hand passing back and forth. Sidney and Myra stand motionless as Helga's hand passes over the garrote. She takes up the dagger, turns with it, closes her eyes.

Was used many times by beautiful dark-haired woman. But only pretending...

SIDNEY. That's amazing! It's from my play *The Murder Game* and it was used every night by a beautiful dark-haired actress!

HELGA. Will be used again. By another woman. Not in play. But...because of play... (*Opens her eyes.*) Because of play, another woman uses this knife.

Sidney and Myra stare at her. She replaces the dagger.

You should put away these things.

SIDNEY. Yes, yes, I think I will. In a month or so I'll sell the whole collection. Tired of them anyway.

HELGA. May be too late. (*Looks gravely at Sidney and Myra.*) I do not enjoy to make-unhappy people, but I must speak when I see something, ja?

SIDNEY. Well I don't know actually; you *could* keep quiet. I mean, you're supposed to be resting, aren't you? Not in your own country...

HELGA. Must speak. Is why God gives gift. Is danger here. Much danger. (*To Sidney.*) To you... (*To Myra.*) And to you. Is death in this room. Is something that—invites death, that carries death... Deathtrap? This is word in English, "deathtrap"?

MYRA. Yes...

SIDNEY. It's the title of a play I've been working on. That's where you've got it from. There's a death in the play; I'm sure that's what you're—responding to. I've been working there at the desk...

HELGA. (*Moving around the desk, touching it.*) Maybe... But feels like *real* death...

SIDNEY. I try to be convincing, act everything out as I write it...

Helga's attention is caught by the chair in which Clifford sat. She goes to it, hesitates, takes hold of its back with both hands, closes her eyes, throws back her head. Myra trembles; Sidney puts a hand to her shoulder.

Side FOUR – Sidney, Clifford

gives a guided tour of the room, folder in hand.

“The room’s furnishings are tastefully chosen antiques: a few chairs and occasional pieces, a buffet downstage right, with liquor decanters, and—the focus of the room—Julian’s desk.” You remember Julian’s desk, don’t you? *The one he worked at before he took Crazy Willard Peterson into his home?* “Patterned draperies hang at the French doors. The room is decorated with framed theatrical posters”—unlike these, which are *window cards*, not *posters*!—“and a collection of guns, handcuffs, maces, broadswords, and battle-axes”—several of which I’m going to make use of any minute now.

Closes the folder, stands glaring at Clifford.

CLIFFORD. That’s it? You’re not going to act out the eleven pages? Would you like me to explain?

SIDNEY. What’s to explain? You’re a lunatic with a death wish; Freud covered it thoroughly.

CLIFFORD. I have exactly the same wish you have: a success wish.

SIDNEY. *This*—is going to bring you success?

CLIFFORD. It hit me that night. Remember, I put in that extra speech when you were looking for the key? It can be a terrific thriller.

SIDNEY. In which someone like me and someone like you give someone like Myra a fatal heart attack?

CLIFFORD. Yes. At the end of Act One.

SIDNEY. What, pray tell, is your *definition* of success? Being gang-banged in the shower room at the state penitentiary?

CLIFFORD. I knew you would have reservations about it; that’s why my first instinct was to say it wasn’t even a thriller. I haven’t enjoyed putting you on, Sidney. I’m glad it’s out in the open.

SIDNEY. You knew I would have reservations...

CLIFFORD. Well you do, don’t you?

SIDNEY. The house madman is writing a play that’ll send both of us to prison—

CLIFFORD. It won’t!

SIDNEY. —I’m standing here terrified, petrified, horrified, stupefied, *crapping my pants*—and he calls that “having reservations.” I’m not

SIDNEY. You're a shit, you know that?

CLIFFORD. (*Raising the gun.*) Would you mind saying that into the microphone? So there we are, Bruhl and Anderson. I write, Sidney thinks. I don't sleep much—last night, for instance, I barely got a wink what with all the tiptoeing that was going on—but I'll make it up next week. Thank you for Act Two. No Inspector Hubbard. Julian's lawyer is the fifth character. Scene One: Julian finds out that Willard is writing the real *Deathtrap* about Doris's murder. With changed names, of course.

The storm is approaching its peak.

He pretends he'll collaborate, but asks old "Peter Pilgrim" or something to check up on Willard, knowing full well there are false and unfair charges to be found. Scene Two: Julian sets Willard up for what'll look like murder in self-defense by *getting him to enact bits of business for the play*. That's *beautiful*, Sidney! The whole thing we just did; it'll play like a dream and I *never* would have thought of it! I'm really in your debt.

Sidney glares.

Julian shoots Willard, who's basically an innocent kid Julian led astray—

SIDNEY. Ooh you bastard...

CLIFFORD. —but the very next moment Inga Van Bronk and Peter Pilgrim come in. She's called him because she's been getting bad vibes all night; they met at Doris's funeral. Willard lives just long enough to tell the truth about himself and Julian and about Doris's murder, and Julian shoots himself. Curtain.

SIDNEY. No Scene Three?

CLIFFORD. About what? They're both dead. The play is over.

SIDNEY. Sounds a little unsatisfying. I'll be glad to think some more.

CLIFFORD. (*Pocketing the key, coming closer to Sidney, gun aimed.*) No, thanks. I'll manage to fill in the holes.

He tucks the gun in his belt and reaches into Sidney's jacket on the desk-chair back.

And now I'm going to pack, and call a taxi. (*Taking bills from Sidney's wallet.*) I'm taking whatever money I can find.

Side FIVE – Sidney, Porter

PORTER. About the Supreme Court justice I most admire. But even the title was a problem. *Frankfurter...*

He shakes his head ruefully. Clifford moves toward the doorway as Sidney comes in, wallet in hand.

SIDNEY. Twenty enough?

CLIFFORD. Too much; we only need salad things and milk. I'm going to Gibson's. *(Goes into the foyer.)*

SIDNEY. *(Pocketing his wallet.)* Pick up some yogurt too. Anything but prune.

CLIFFORD. *(Taking a jacket from the rack.)* Okay. *(Getting into it; to Porter.)* You aren't in the driveway, are you?

PORTER. No, I pulled over on the side.

CLIFFORD. See you later or nice meeting you, whichever it turns out to be. *(Takes car keys from his pocket.)*

PORTER. I'm sure we'll be seeing each other again.

Clifford nods to Sidney and goes out, closing the door behind him.

Pleasant young fellow... Good-looking too.

SIDNEY. Yes...

Turns to Porter.

Do you think he's gay? Homosexual...

PORTER. I know what "gay" means, Sidney. Elizabeth told me long ago. No, he didn't strike me that way.

SIDNEY. I have a sneaking suspicion he might be... But, as long as he does his job well I suppose it's none of my business, is it?

PORTER. Well, in essence he's a domestic employee, and I think that in such circumstances his sexual preference could be a legitimate matter of concern.

SIDNEY. I wasn't asking for a legal opinion; I was just saying that it's really not my business...

PORTER. Oh. In that case, no, it isn't.

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 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?

Porter takes a couple of sheets of typewritten paper from his briefcase.

Side SIX – Helga, Sidney, Clifford - Helga, Porter

HELGA. Thank you. I take two.

SIDNEY. You're welcome to take more.

HELGA. No, two are enough.

CLIFFORD. *(Withdrawing a few steps.)* It's really blowing up out there.

HELGA. *(Pocketing the candles.)* Ja, sometime they are right with their predictions... *(Ready to tie her kerchief; to Sidney, sotto.)* I should stay?

SIDNEY. *(Sotto.)* No need to. *(And aloud.)* I hope you beat the rain.

He moves toward the foyer.

HELGA. I go through wood; is less to walk. *(To Clifford.)* Good night.

CLIFFORD. Good night.

SIDNEY. *(Opening the French doors.)* It's pitch black. Will you be able to find your way?

HELGA. Ja, I have torch. *(Getting it out.)*

SIDNEY. Good night.

Helga stops, turns, gasps.

What's wrong?

Clifford moves closer; he and Sidney exchange worried looks as Helga stays speechless for another moment.

HELGA. My daughter is pregnant! Ohhhhh! So many years they try! So many doctors they go to! And now, at last, they make me grandmother! Ei! Goddank! Goddank!

Another stunning realization lights her face.

I must call and tell them!

She hurries out. Sidney, smiling, closes the doors and bolts them, draws the draperies.

CLIFFORD. She told you I'm the man in boots who attacks you?

SIDNEY. Yes.

CLIFFORD. She noticed them just before you came in. *(Smiles.)* Did you tell her I used a styrofoam log, not one of the weapons?

SIDNEY. Didn't think it quite advisable. I told her you're giving me karate lessons and we're attacking each other all over the place. *(Smiles.)* "The closer you stay to the truth, the better off you are."

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!