

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 that 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 dialled "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 prowled 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 centre 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.*

CLIFFORD It's not in a binder. For the Xeroxing..

SIDNEY Makes no never-mind. *(They exchange manuscripts)*

CLIFFORD I've got the first draft here too. *(Sits by the desk)* There's a scene between Diane and Carlo in Act One that I may have been wrong to cut, and the Diane-and-Richard scene starts earlier, before they know Carlo is back.

SIDNEY *(sitting behind the desk)* Did you do several drafts?

CLIFFORD Just the one. It's a mess, but I think you'll be able to decipher it, if you'd like to see those two scenes.

SIDNEY I would. By all means.

CLIFFORD *extracts a less tidy manuscript from the envelope.*

I had a feeling there was a Diane-and-Carlo scene I wasn't seeing... Before the murder?

CLIFFORD Yes. I was afraid the act would run too long. (*Hands the second manuscript over*)

SIDNEY Thanks. What else do you have in there?

CLIFFORD Oh, the outline, which I departed from considerably. I made it the way you suggested, a page per scene, loose leaf. And some lines I jotted down and never got to use.

SIDNEY Threw away the ones you did use as you used them?

CLIFFORD Yes.

SIDNEY Same way I work...

MYRA *crosses with glasses of ginger ale.*

CLIFFORD Everything was in the one envelope, so I just grabbed it. Thank you.

MYRA You're welcome. (*She gives SIDNEY his glass, along with an intent look*)

SIDNEY Thanks...

CLIFFORD It's a two-hour walk to the station, so I had to leave right after we talked.

MYRA *withdraws left.*

SIDNEY Two hours?

CLIFFORD I walk longer than that; I'm one writer who's not going to get flabby. I work out with weights every morning. I came *this close* to making the Olympic decathlon team.

SIDNEY Really?

CLIFFORD (*hands apart*) Well, *this close*.

SIDNEY I'll be careful not to argue with you. I'm on the Olympic sloth team. Gold medal. Fall asleep in any position. (*Raises his glass, falls asleep, wakes up*) Deathtrap.

CLIFFORD Deathtrap.

MYRA Deathtrap.

SIDNEY *turns, MYRA is seated at left, glass in hand, needlework in her lap.*

It'll be toasted with more than ginger ale some day, if Sidney is right about it, and I'm sure he is.

CLIFFORD I hope so. I toasted it with beer the other night.

MYRA We have some. Would you rather?

CLIFFORD No, no, this is fine, thanks.

SIDNEY Are you planning to stay in here?

MYRA Yes.

CLIFFORD (*manuscript open on his lap*) Do you think I overdid the set description? All the exact locations for each piece of furniture?

SIDNEY The set description? (*Looking in the original manuscript*) I don't remember anything wrong with it... No, this is perfect, couldn't be better. (*Turns pages*) You certainly type beautifully... Electric?

CLIFFORD No. I can't see electric typewriters; if there's a power failure you can't work.

SIDNEY That's the whole point in owning one. (*Turning another page*) No, the real trouble with them, I find—with Zenobia here, at any rate—is that you can make only one decent carbon. The second carbon is so muddy as to be almost illegible.

CLIFFORD *turns a page, MYRA leans forward nervously.*

You don't have that problem with—

MYRA (*interrupting the question*) Sidney has some wonderful ideas for improving the play, Mr Anderson!

CLIFFORD I'm—sure he does. I'm looking forward to hearing them.