

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.

SIDNEY. Couldn't you do that in the living room, dear?

MYRA. There's no good work light in there.

SIDNEY. I seem to recall a paisley chair with a light beside it bright enough for the engraving of Bibles on pinheads.

MYRA. It's *too* bright, and the chair is too low. I'll be quiet.

SIDNEY. Darling, this is Clifford's first play and I'm the first person to read it. I'm sure he'd prefer our discussion to be private. (*To Clifford.*) Wouldn't you? Don't be embarrassed to say so.

CLIFFORD. No, I don't mind Mrs. Bruhl being here. In fact I like it. It makes me feel a little less as if I've been summoned to the principal's office.

SIDNEY. Oh.

*Myra settles in.*

I'm sorry if I awe you.

CLIFFORD. You do. All those plays, and the things you say... I never thought of calling my typewriter anything but Smith Corona.

SIDNEY. As long as it answers...

CLIFFORD. *You're* welcome to read the play too, Mrs. Bruhl, if you'd like to.

MYRA. I would.

CLIFFORD. (*To Sidney.*) I'm curious to know how women are going to react to Diane's decision. About the gun.

MYRA. Sidney told me a little about it at dinner, but he stopped at the surprises. I don't even know who kills whom.

CLIFFORD. Good, you shouldn't. (*To Sidney.*) I think that was the trouble with *Murderer's Child*, if you'll forgive me for saying so. From the opening curtain it was so obvious that Dr. Mannheim

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

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—

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. I suddenly feel as if I'm on the spot.

SIDNEY. You are, really. Myra's put you there, put us both there.

MYRA. I felt it should be brought up now, before—anything was done.

SIDNEY. Yes, yes, you were quite right. Quite right.

*Clifford is thinking.*

What's your reaction, Clifford?

CLIFFORD. (*Rises.*) Well, first of all, I'm overwhelmed, really honored and—staggered, that Sidney Bruhl would even *consider* the idea of putting aside one of his own plays to work with me on mine. I mean, there I was, sitting in that theater when I was twelve years old, and who would think that someday I'd be standing *here*, weighing the chance to—

SIDNEY. (*Interrupting him.*) We get the gist of this passage.

CLIFFORD. It's a golden opportunity that I'm sure I ought to seize with both hands.

MYRA. You should. Yes.

CLIFFORD. But...the thing is...it's as if I went to a doctor, one of the world's leading specialists, and he recommended surgery. Well, even with my respect for his eminence and his experience—I would still want to get a second opinion, wouldn't I? I'm sure your ideas are terrific, but you're right, Mrs. Bruhl, it wouldn't be—fair for me to hear them now, without some sort of an understanding or arrangement. And to be perfectly honest, right now, *without* having heard them, I feel that *Deathtrap* is very good as it is. Not perfect certainly; I guess it could still use a little fine-tuning. But—I'm not sure it needs surgery. What I ought to do, I think, is Xerox a few copies tomorrow morning and send them off to some of those agents you recommended to us. If they say too that it needs major rewriting, then I'll be coming back here begging you to do what Mrs. Bruhl suggested, and I'll be willing to make whatever arrangement you think is right. The same one you had with Mr. Kaufman, I guess. I hope I haven't offended you.

SIDNEY. Not at all.

MYRA. Mr. Anderson, please. Agents know about contracts; they don't know—

SIDNEY. (*Interrupting, gathering the two manuscripts together.*) Don't,