

SIDNEY & CLIFFORD

dum. Professional playwrights don't offer a script until they're absolutely sure that everything in it is playable and doable. Now let's show 'em why Bruhl and Anderson are going to go down in theatrical history!

They scuffle again, an earnest and fairly long struggle punctuated by exclamations and comments. At the end of it, Sidney manages to thrust Clifford D. and get to the v. wall.

Voilà! It works!

CLIFFORD. *(Pulling himself together.)* And look at your shirt. And mine. Jesus!

Sidney comes D.

I scratched your neck.

SIDNEY. *(Wiping it with his hand.)* I'll survive. The second bit now; much less strenuous and very brief.

CLIFFORD. I'm glad of that.

SIDNEY. I'm Hubbard now and you're Julian. Go on up to the wall.

Clifford goes v.s.

Take the axe.

Clifford takes the axe from the wall and turns, holds it with both hands.

It doesn't look natural that way.

CLIFFORD. It feels natural.

SIDNEY. Try a different way.

Clifford shifts to another hold on the axe, and shakes his head.

CLIFFORD. It doesn't feel right this way.

SIDNEY. All right, go back to the way you had it.

Clifford does so, waits.

Now put it down. On the floor.

START

A bit puzzled, Clifford obeys. Sidney turns and takes the pistol from the mantel, aims it at Clifford.

Stand very still. We have goodbyes to say.

Clifford's eyes widen.

Deathtrap is over. We're now into theater *vérité*.

The storm gathers strength.

The gun from *Gunpoint*. No blanks as at the dear old Lyceum though, real bullets, courtesy of the Messrs. Remington. I loaded it last night, after you were asleep. I really don't want that play to be written. Even though nothing can be proved, too much will be talked about, and I'm a little too old and, yes, uptight, to join the Washington secretaries, and the ex-lovers of ex-presidents, and the happy hookers, and the happily hooked, in the National Bad-Taste Exposition. And I honestly can't think of any other way to make sure you won't set me up in a centrally located booth. I asked Porter to have you checked out in Hartford. A few blots were found on your record, precisely the ones you told me about, and Porter feels—we discussed it this evening—that they tend to justify the unease I've been feeling. So I came home and gave you your notice, you became abusive and violent, and Mrs. ten Dorp's three-week-old vision came to pass. Luckily I got to the gun, which I have the license and right to use in self-defense. It beats digging up the vegetable patch, doesn't it? I'm truly sorry, Cliff. If you hadn't succumbed to *thrilleritis malignis*, in what is *surely* one of the most acute cases on record, who knows, we might actually have *become* the team of Bruhl and Anderson. As it is, we'll have to be—only Bruhl. I'm out of dialogue. Your go.

CLIFFORD. What can I say? I'm not going to beg.

SIDNEY. I thought you might promise to become a steamfitter or something.

CLIFFORD. Would you believe me?

SIDNEY. No.

CLIFFORD. So? (*Shrugs.*) I'm hoping you'll take pity on a pretty face.

SIDNEY. Oh God, I shall miss you very much. Goodbye, Cliff.

CLIFFORD. Goodbye, Sidney.

Sidney hesitates an instant, then shoots; the blast is louder than the thunder.

Clifford stands for a moment and scratches himself.

I thought a click would be anticlimactic, so I bought some blanks this morning. While I was getting the bullets for this one.

Clifford takes a pistol from the wall and aims it at Sidney.

Sit down—dum-dum.

Sidney stands staring at him.

Sit down. *Peripeteia*? Reversal? You talked about it the first day of the seminar. Important element of all drama. Put that down.

Sidney, stunned, sits and puts the gun down. Clifford draws a deep breath and moves from his fixed position, keeping the pistol trained on Sidney.

The problem was, I had this terrific first act, and I couldn't think of a second act. Very frustrating. Particularly since I'm sharing bed and board with the old master plotter himself, "author of *The Murder Game*." And of *In for the Kill*, which I consider an even more elegant construction.

SIDNEY. Thanks, that makes two of us.

CLIFFORD. (*Taking a pair of handcuffs from the wall.*) At present, yes. (*Approaching Sidney.*) Be my guest. (*Offers the handcuffs.*)

SIDNEY. (*Mock ingenuous.*) You mean put them on?

CLIFFORD. That's what I mean...

Sidney resignedly takes the handcuffs and begins cuffing one wrist. Clifford withdraws a bit.

SIDNEY. What are you going to do?

CLIFFORD. Continue gloating. Through the arm of the chair. Don't play dumb! Through the arm!

Sighing, Sidney passes the other cuff through the chair arm and locks it about his wrist. Clifford sits on the corner of the desk.

So there I am with my problem. Sidney's not going to help me with it, not voluntarily; this I know from square one. Sidney uses three kinds of deodorant and four kinds of mouthwash; not for him the whiff of scandal. But is there maybe a way I can *harness* that seventeen-jewel brain and set it to work for me all unwittingly? So I begin writing Act One, and every time I leave the desk, I inconspicuously lock the drawer. So inconspicuously, in fact, that for a day and a half smart Sidney doesn't notice. But dull old Porter comes in, thank God, and saves me the embarrassment of getting heavy-handed and leaving a loose page lying around.

END

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.