

Scene 2

*As the lights come up, Sidney has unlocked the front door from the outside and is showing Clifford Anderson into the foyer, while Myra, who has been fretting in the study, hurries to greet them. The draperies are drawn over the French doors, and all the room's lamps are lighted. Sidney has replaced his sweater with a jacket; Myra has freshened up and perhaps changed into a simple dress. Clifford is in his mid-twenties and free of obvious defects; an attractive young man in jeans, boots, and a heavy sweater. He carries a bulging Manila envelope.*

START

SIDNEY. Actually it was built in seventeen *ninety-four* but they were out of nines at the hardware store so I backdated it ten years.

CLIFFORD. It's a beautiful house...

SIDNEY. (*Closing the door.*) Historical Society had kittens.

MYRA. Hello!

*She offers her hand; Clifford shakes it warmly.*

SIDNEY. This is Clifford Anderson, dear. My wife, Myra.

CLIFFORD. Hello. It's a pleasure to meet you.

MYRA. Come in. I was beginning to worry...

SIDNEY. Watch out for the beam.

*Ducking, Clifford comes into the study. Sidney follows.*

You can always tell an authentic Colonial by the visitors' bruised foreheads.

*Myra smiles nervously. Clifford looks about, awed.*

CLIFFORD. The room you work in?

SIDNEY. How did you guess.

CLIFFORD. The typewriter, and all these posters...

*He moves about, studying the window cards. Sidney watches him; Myra glances at Sidney. Clifford touches the Master's covered typewriter, then points at the wall.*

Is that the mace that was used in *Murderer's Child*?

SIDNEY. Yes. And the dagger is from *The Murder Game*.

*Clifford goes closer, touches the dagger blade.*

Careful, it's sharp. The trick one was substituted in Act Two.

CLIFFORD. (*Moves his hands to an axe handle.*) *In for the Kill?*

SIDNEY. Yes.

CLIFFORD. I can't understand why that play didn't run...

SIDNEY. Critics peeing on it might be the answer.

*Clifford goes on with his inspection.*

MYRA. The train must have been late.

*Sidney pays no notice.*

Was it?

CLIFFORD. (*Turning.*) No, Mr. Bruhl was. The train was on time.

SIDNEY. I had to get gas, and Frank insisted on fondling the spark plugs.

*Clifford points at a window card.*

CLIFFORD. Do you know that *Gunpoint* was the first play I ever saw? I had an aunt in New York, and I came in on the train one Saturday—by myself, another first—from Hartford. She took me to the matinee. I was twelve years old.

SIDNEY. If you're trying to depress me, you've made it.

CLIFFORD. How? Oh. I'm sorry. But that's how I got hooked on thrillers.

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 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 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?

SIDNEY. No, dear, I believe I'll have ginger ale too.

END

*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.*