

That can be more profound, you know. And she's got a look about her—not how people are, but how they ought to be. Do you know when I said that about a goddess, do you know who I was thinking of? Her.

TED: Venus?

TCHAIK: She's got exactly the same neck—long and gentle. That's a sign.

TED: What of?

TCHAIK: Spiritual beauty. Like Venus. *Crosses to shelf downstage right for book and back again to center:* That's what the picture really represents. The birth of beauty in the human soul. My Botticelli book says so. Listen. *Reading from a Fontana pocket book:* "Venus, that is to say humanity, is a nymph of excellent comeliness, born of heaven. Her soul and mind are Love and Charity. Her eyes, dignity. Her hands, liberality. Her feet, modesty." All signs, you see. "Venus is the mother of Grace, of Beauty, and of Faith."

TED: And this bird of yours is the mother of all that?

TCHAIK, *sits armchair:* No, of course not. Stop trying to make me into a fool. What I mean is, that look of hers is ideal beauty, TED. It means she's got grace inside her. Really beautiful people are beautiful inside them. Do you see?

TED: You mean like after taking Andrew's Liver Salts?

TCHAIK, *rising and replacing book downstage right:* Yes, that's exactly what I mean.

TED: Oh, Tchaik, now seriously, come off it. That's all a lot of balls, and you know it. There's a lot of dim, greedy little nitty girls about who are as pretty as pictures.

TCHAIK, *puts Mozart record in sleeve:* I don't mean pretty. I mean . . . well, what you called carriage, for instance. What your Lavinia's got. It's not just something you learn, the way to walk and that. It's something inside you. I mean real carriage, the way you see some girls walk, sort of putting the air around them like clothes—you can't practice that. You've got first to love the world. Then it comes out. *Puts sleeve in record jacket. Tiny pause.*

TED, *rising:* You poor nut.

TCHAIK: What do you mean? *Puts record jacket on shelf.*

TED: Nut. Nut.

TCHAIK: Why?

TED: Oh, dear for you.

The doorbell rings.

TCHAIK: God! There she is.

Tchaik rushes to the wardrobe for his blazer. Ted picks up towel, robe, and slippers from the bed. Tchaik crosses to door—Ted to wardrobe—they collide upstage center. Ted throws towel, robe, slippers into the wardrobe. He turns and sees the tags on the blazer, runs to Tchaik and rips them off.

TED: Now listen. Last swallow of coffee and I'm away. Cleaning tag! Nine thirty you'll see me. Nine thirty-one you won't. Work to do at home—get it? *Tchaik exits.* Oh, hey—where's the bottle of Dubonnet? *Tchaik reenters speechless.* It's the one thing I left you to do.

TCHAIK: I know. I forgot.

TED: You nit! Now you've nothing to give her for a cocktail.

The bell rings again.

TCHAIK: What am I going to do?

TED: Well, there's nothing you can do, is there? Just don't mention it, that's all. Say nothing about it. She comes from the suburbs. She probably won't expect anything. Wine at dinner will impress her enough.

TCHAIK: Oh, hell.

TED: Why don't you leave her standing there. She'll go away in five minutes. *He pushes Tchaik out of the door.*

DEATHTRAP

by Ira Levin

ACT II, SCENE 1

Deathtrap is a comedy thriller that twists and turns its way from shock to laugh to shock and back again. Sidney is a mystery playwright living with his wife, Myra, in Connecticut.

Their living room is decorated with theatrical artifacts and real weapons—both ancient and modern. Sidney has taken up with Clifford, a young male playwrighting student, and with Clifford's aid, he contrives and carries out a plan to murder Myra. The plan involves his receiving a great new play in the mail from a young playwright, then leading Myra to believe that he intends to murder the playwright to steal his play, then inviting the playwright (Clifford) to the house. The plot climaxes with a series of violent and startling altercations that, as planned, leave the sickly Myra dead on the floor of a heart attack. The authorities have no reason to expect foul play, and Clifford moves in with Sidney. The next day the two writers are sitting at adjoining desks, pursuing their respective careers side by side. But Sidney, whose one theatrical success was followed by four flops, sits idly by his typewriter and blank pages, while Clifford types away at a feverish pace. Clifford is supposedly writing a serious play about a welfare office but he refuses to show the manuscript to Sidney "till the draft is done." While Clifford is away on an errand, Sidney jimmies open the desk drawer in which Clifford's manuscript is locked away. To his amazement and horror he discovers that the play Clifford is writing is actually an accurate reenactment of Myra's murder, down to the detail of an unexpected visit by a female Dutch psychic. Clifford returns and resumes his typing but Sidney interrupts by reading the opening paragraphs of Clifford's script.

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 going to use one of *those* on you; I'm going to beat you to death with *Roget's Thesaurus!*

CLIFFORD: There is no possible way for anyone to prove what did or did not cause Myra's heart attack. Look, if I could change things I would, but I can't; it *has* to be a playwright. Who else can pretend to receive a finished work that could make tons of money?

SIDNEY: A novelist! A composer! Why am I discussing this?

CLIFFORD: A sure-fire smash-hit symphony? No. And would a novelist or a composer know where to get a garrotte that squirts blood, and how to stage a convincing murder? And it has to be a playwright *who writes thrillers*, because Arthur Miller probably has old sample cases hanging on his wall. I *suppose* I could make it Wilton instead of Westport . . .

SIDNEY: Why make it *anywhere?* *Why make it?*

CLIFFORD: It's *there*, Sidney!

SIDNEY: That's mountains, not plays! Plays aren't there till some asshole writes them!

CLIFFORD: Stop and think for a minute, will you? Think. About that night. Try to see it all from an audience's viewpoint. *Everything we did to convince Myra that she was seeing a real murder—would have exactly the same effect on them.* Weren't we giving a play? Didn't we write it, rehearse it? Wasn't *she* our audience? *He rises.* Sidney is listening as one fascinated by a *lunatic's raving.* Scene One: Julian tells Doris about this terrific play that's come in the mail. He jokes about killing for it, then calls Willard and invites him over, getting him to bring the

original copy. Audience thinks exactly what Doris thinks: Julian might kill Willard. Scene Two: *everything that happened from the moment we came through that door*. All the little ups and downs we put in to make it ring true: the I'm-expecting-a-phone-call bit, everything. Tightened up a little, naturally. And then the strangling, which scares the audience as much as it does Doris.

SIDNEY: No wonder you didn't need an outline . . .

CLIFFORD, *tapping his temple*: It's all up here, every bit of it. Scene Three: "Inga Van Bronk." A few laughs, right? Can't hurt. Then Julian and Doris get ready to go upstairs—it looks as if the act is drawing to a kind of so-so close—and pow, in comes Willard, out of the grave and seeking vengeance. Shock? Surprise? Doris has her heart attack, Julian gets up from the fake beating—and the audience realizes that Julian and Willard are in cahoots, that there isn't any sure-fire thriller, that Willard is moving in. The curtain is Julian burning the manuscripts. Or calling the doctor; I'm not sure which. Now be honest about it: isn't that a sure-fire first act?

SIDNEY: Yes. And what an intermission. Twenty years to life.

CLIFFORD: No one can prove it really happened. They *can't*. How can they?

SIDNEY: And what do you say to the man from the *Times*, when he says, "Don't you work for Sidney Bruhl, and didn't his wife have a heart attack just around the time you came there?"

CLIFFORD, *turning out his hands for the obvious answer*: "No comment."

SIDNEY: Oh my God . . . (*moves upstage in futility*)

CLIFFORD: I know it's going to be a little sticky, but—well, everybody's opening up about everything these days, aren't they? In print, on TV; why not on stage, as long as it can't be proved? I've given it some serious thought, Sidney, and I honestly believe it'll *help* the play, give it an added dimension of—intriguing gossip.

SIDNEY: I'm sure you're right. I can see the little box in *New York Magazine* now: "Tongues are wagging about interesting similarities between events in the new play *Deathtrap* and the private lives of its author Clifford Anderson and his employer Sidney Bruhl, who committed suicide on opening night. When queried, Mr. Anderson said, 'No comment.'" *I have a comment, Cliff. No. Absolutely, definitely no. I have a name and a*

reputation—tattered, perhaps, but still valid for dinner invitations, house seats, and the conducting of summer seminars. I want to live out my years as "author of *The Murder Game*," not "fag who knocked off his wife." *Turns right*. Why look, a field-stone fireplace! *Heading for it, folder at the ready*: Let's see if it's practical to the extent that paper—

CLIFFORD, *interrupting him*: DON'T YOU DARE! *Sidney stops*. You burn that—and I go out of here and write it again somewhere else. I'll—get a house-sitting job. *Goes to Sidney and puts out his hand*. Give it to me. Give it, Sidney. *Sidney turns, and hands the folder to Clifford*. I helped you kill for the chance to become what I want to be. You're not going to take it away from me. *He goes to the desk, Sidney watches him*. I had *hoped* that when I showed you the finished draft, you would be impressed enough to—get over your *Angel Street* uptightness and pitch in, but I guess we can forget about *that*.

SIDNEY, *smiles faintly*: A collaboration?

CLIFFORD: It's mostly your idea, isn't it? I'm not pretending it's all my baby. And I know that Scene One is coming out a little—heavy and stilted. I hoped we could be a team, Bruhl and Anderson.

SIDNEY: Rodgers and Heartless.

CLIFFORD: Now you see, I could never come up with something like that.

SIDNEY: I'm sorry, but I really don't feel like collaborating on my public humiliation.

CLIFFORD: Next season's hit. Don't say I didn't ask.