

Deathtrap by Ira Levin

Sidney realizes what the script is about.

Sidney:

So you've lost your interest in thrillers, eh?

Clifford:

Mm.

Sidney:

No taste for the intricate plotting and the glib superficial characters...

Clifford:

Mm-mmm

Sidney:

Want to do something real and meaningful, socially relevant.

Clifford:

Hey, cut it out, will you? *Your* idea'll start coming.

Sidney:

Possibly...

Clifford:

Just relax, and don't try to bug *me*, It'll come.

Sidney:

"Deathtrap A Thriller in Two Acts." "Characters. Julian Crane. Doris Crane. Willard Peterson. Inga Van Bronk." "the action takes place in Julian Crane's study, in the Crane home in Westport, Connecticut."

Clifford:

You have one hell of a nerve stealing---

Sidney:

“SETTING! Sliding doors upstage center open on a foyer which are the house’s front door, entrances to the living room and kitchen, and the stairway to the second floor! French doors upstage right open out to a shrubbery-flanked patio! Downstage left, is a fieldstone fireplace, *practical to the extent that PAPER CAN BE BURNED IN IT!* “The room’s furnishings are tastefully chosen antiques and the—focus of the room---Julian’s desk.” You remember Julian’s desk don’t you? *The one he worked at before he took Crazy Willard Peterson into his home?* “The room is decorated with a collection of guns, handcuffs, and swords”---several of which I’m going to make use of any minutes now.

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 banged in the shower room at the state penitentiary?

Clifford:

I knew you would have some 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---

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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 garrote 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 smaples 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? 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:

It's all up here, every bit of it. Scene Three: "Inga Van Bronk." A few laughs, right? Can't hurt. Then Julia 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:

“No comment.”

Sidney:

Oh my god....

Clifford:

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..” Why look, a fieldstone fireplace! Let's see if its practical to the extent that paper---

Clifford:

DON'T YOU DARE! You burn that—and I go out of here and write it again somewhere else. Give it to me. Give it, Sidney. I helped you kill for the chance to become what I want to be. You're not going to take it away from me. I had *hoped* that when I showed you the finished draft, you would be impressed enough to---get over you *Angel Street* uptightness and pitch in, but I guess we can forget about *that*.

Sidney:

A collaboration?

Clifford:

It's mostly your idea, isn't it? I'm not pretending it's---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 seasons' hit. Don't say I didn't ask. I think maybe I'd better move out anyway...

Sidney:

Why?

Clifford:

When Helga ten Dorp said a woman was going to use the dagger because of a play—maybe she really wasn't that far off target.

Sidney:

Don't be silly. I—I love you; I wouldn't think of—trying to harm you. Besides, you'd break my neck.

Clifford:

Goddamn right I would.

Sidney:

So don't talk about leaving.

Clifford:

I don't know... I'm not going to feel comfortable with you being unhappy about this...

Sidney:

I'll whistle a lot.