

LIPTON (*Still on his knees*) The name is Lipton. Sidney Lipton. By the way, were there any calls for me?

JOE Your wife called.

LIPTON Sylvia?

JOE *What do I know your wife's name?*

LIPTON (*Nods*) Sylvia. She checks on me every minute. Dreadful woman. If she calls again, I'm not here, all right? . . . Where am I, still on the floor?

JOE (*Takes the glasses out of his pocket*) Here. Here's your glasses.

LIPTON You found them? (*Puts out his hand*) Oh, good. Could you put them in my hand, please?

JOE Here.

(*JOE puts the glasses into LIPTON'S hand*)

LIPTON Is that my hand?

JOE *Certainly* it's your hand.

LIPTON That'll give you an idea how bad my eyes are. (*He puts the glasses on, still on his knees*) Ohh. Ohh, yes, there we are . . . (*Looks up*) Oh, we're inside, aren't we? (*He looks around*) Ohhh! *This—this* is gorgeous! *This* is what I call a gorgeous room. This is one of your better showplaces. What is this, the living room?

JOE Certainly it's the living room . . . What does it look like?

LIPTON Do I know? Was I ever invited before? (*Looks around*) You know what this place reminds me of? Gatsby . . . Did you see *The Great Gatsby*? Wasn't that gorgeous to look at? *Lousy* picture, but beautiful sets—

JOE Is that why you broke in here? To discuss *movies* with me?

LIPTON Certainly not. I'm here on business. *Very* important business.

JOE *What* business?

LIPTON I'll get to it. Be patient. Let me look around. (*Admiringly caresses the carved façade of the fireplace*) How often does a person like me get inside one of these big-time houses? . . . Do you have something soft to drink? R.C. Cola? A Yoo-hoo?

JOE If you have business with me, you make an appointment like everyone else.

LIPTON (*Looking around*) My business is not the kind of business you think, and I'm not like everyone else. (*Points to an ornate armchair*) I love the chair. I don't fall in love easily, but I am in love with this chair. Just for curiosity, what did you pay? Three thousand? Thirty-four hundred? Am I being pushy?

JOE I don't remember what I paid for chairs. Is that what you are? An antique dealer?

LIPTON Antiques? No. Antiquity, perhaps.

JOE What does that mean?

LIPTON What does *anything* mean?

JOE What do you mean by "What does *anything* mean"?

LIPTON What is meant by meaning? What is the meaning of "meant"? What is real or unreal? What is here, what is there? What the hell are we talking

about? I don't know—I'm still dizzy from that fall I took.

JOE I can't make you out. You're not a burglar, that I can tell.

LIPTON A burglar? No. An antique dealer? No. But who am I? What am I? Why am I here? That's the mystery, isn't it? God, I love a good mystery. Did you see *Chinatown*? Jack Nicholson, Faye Dunaway? They cut his nose, he wore a bandaid for two hours. Three-fifty a ticket to see a man with a slit nose, where do they get the nerve? A nice picture, but I can see slit noses for free at Mount Sinai—

JOE If you don't tell me who you are, it's not your nose that's going to get slit.

LIPTON Ah, ah, you're losing patience, aren't you? Mustn't lose patience. All in good time. Patience, Joe, patience. (*Looks at a crystal vase*) Lovely crystal. Who picked it out, your wife, Rose?

JOE How do you know my wife, Rose?

LIPTON Did I say I knew her?

JOE But you mentioned her name.

LIPTON To mention her name is not to say I know her. Ergo, to know is to meet . . . Ergo, to be is not necessarily to exist . . . Ergo, to know is to question, to question is to ask . . . Ergo, what is meant by knowing and what is meant by "ergo"? . . . Oh, God, I have such pains in the head. I could use an aspirin. Valium, acupuncture, anything.

JOE You're not getting anything from me until I get some information from *you!*

LIPTON Interesting. You're not as tall as I expected. They led me to believe you were a bigger man—six four, six five. Not that it matters . . . You know how tall Alan Ladd was?

JOE I'M NOT INTERESTED IN ALAN LADD!

LIPTON Two inches shorter than Veronica Lake. They never made a movie where they had a child . . . They couldn't find one small enough. I love movie gossip . . .

JOE Who's been talking to you? What do you know about me?

LIPTON I know a lot and I know nothing! Yet to know nothing is to know everything . . . Why do I say things like that? What does that mean? I have cramps in the head. Did you ever get cramps in the head?

JOE A lunatic! A lunatic wandered into my house from the snow. Why do I answer you? Why do I bother talking to you?

LIPTON Curiosity! There is something curious about me, you've got to admit . . . All right, enough chitchat, enough fiddle-faddle, enough fencing with each other. Let's get down to brass tacks, Joe Benjamin. Let's discuss the reason of the mysterious midnight visit of this most curious and somewhat sinister figure standing in front of you. Why, at this hour, on this night, in this year, in this city, in this house, on this rug, in these shoes, do I, Sidney Leonard Lipton stand before you? WHAT BUSINESS DO WE, STRANGERS TILL NOT FIVE MINUTES AGO, HAVE UNTO EACH OTHER?