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SF PERUSALS

God's Favorite

A Comedy

by Neil Simon

A Samuel French Acting Edition



New York Hollywood London Toronto

SAMUELFRENCH.COM

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To Ellen and Nancy

GOD'S FAVORITE *was first presented on December 11, 1974, by Emanuel Azenberg and Eugene V. Wolsk at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre, New York City, with the following cast:*

JOE BENJAMIN	Vincent Gardenia
BEN BENJAMIN	Lawrence John Moss
SARAH BENJAMIN	Laura Esterman
ROSE BENJAMIN	Maria Karnilova
DAVID BENJAMIN	Terry Kiser
MADY	Rosetta LeNoire
MORRIS	Nick LaTour
SIDNEY LIPTON	Charles Nelson Reilly

Directed by Michael Bennett
Settings by William Ritman
Lighting by Tharon Musser
Costumes by Joseph G. Aulisi

The Scene

The action takes place in the Benjamin mansion on the North Shore of Long Island.

Act One

scene one Midnight.

scene two Two weeks later.

Act Two

The Holocaust after.

Act One

God's Favorite

SCENE I

The scene is the palatial home of wealthy businessman JOE BENJAMIN *on the North Shore of Long Island Sound. The design of the living room is stylized. It is today, and yet it has a feeling of timelessness. Wooden-beamed ceilings seem to stretch up to heaven itself. An enormous French door leads out to a portico which faces the Sound. A large oak door on one side of the room leads to the entrance foyer. An oak door on the other side leads to the dining room. The walls are adorned with paintings worthy of a collection, which indeed one day they will be. Leather-bound volumes of the great works of literature line the shelves.*

Before the curtain rises, we can hear the chiming of a grandfather clock signaling the hour. One . . . two . . . three . . . four . . .

The curtain rises. The room is in darkness. Through the French door, moonlight can be seen reflecting on the snow; it pours an eerie light into the room.

The clock continues. Five . . . six . . . seven . . . eight . . . nine . . . ten . . . eleven . . . twelve. All is silent.

Suddenly, a solitary figure is seen outside on the portico. The light is too dim for us to make out his features. He looks around carefully, blows on his hands, then attempts to open the door. It is locked. He blows on his hands again, looks around once more, and tries the door again, but this time using more pressure. The door opens a few inches—but at that very moment, a piercing burglar alarm goes off.

The figure pulls away from the door in fear. He seems panicked as he starts to run in three different directions,

constantly changing his mind. Finally, in desperation, he jumps over the balcony and disappears from sight. An explosion of snow rises up visibly—he must have landed in a snow bank.

The alarm continues its scream. The oak door suddenly swings open. A man enters. He switches on the lights. He is dressed in a rich silk robe, silk pajamas and monogrammed velvet slippers. He reaches behind the shelf and turns off a switch. The alarm stops.

This is JOE BENJAMIN. *In his late fifties, he gives an impression of great strength of character. He glances around the room quickly, giving a fast look behind the drapes. Then he goes over to the French door and notices it is open.*

Two more people rush in through the oak door in their night clothes. They are BEN BENJAMIN *and* SARAH BENJAMIN, *a pair of twenty-four-year-old twins, or as close as we can approximate. The brother and sister have red hair of the same shade; their I.Q. is 160—between them.*

BEN What is it, Dad? What happened?

JOE I don't know.

SARAH What happened, Dad? What is it?

JOE I said I don't know.

SARAH We heard the alarm go off.

BEN Did you hear the alarm go off, Dad?

JOE Certainly I heard it go off. That's why I'm down here. *(To* SARAH*)* Close your bathrobe.

*(*SARAH *can never keep her robe tied. She closes it)*

SARAH My God, it was really the alarm.

BEN *(Points)* The French door is open. Look!

SARAH It's open, Dad. The French door. Look!

JOE I can see it's open. Stop repeating everything.
(The telephone rings)

BEN It's the phone, Dad.

SARAH Dad, it's the phone.
(It rings again)

JOE I can hear it. Close your bathrobe. Ben, answer the phone.

SARAH Answer the phone, Ben.

JOE I'm going to look outside.

SARAH Suppose someone's out there?

JOE That's why I'm looking. That's the whole point of it. Close your robe. *(The phone rings again)* Answer that.

*(*JOE *goes out to the portico, and* BEN *picks up the phone)*

BEN *(Into the phone)* Hello? . . . Yes?

SARAH Who is it?

BEN The burglar alarm company.

SARAH Daddy, it's the burglar alarm company.

BEN *(Into the phone)* Yes, we just heard it.

SARAH Ben said we just heard it.

JOE *(From out on the portico, yells)* Close your bathrobe!

BEN *(Into the phone)* We found the living-room French door open. My father's checking now.

SARAH What do they think?

BEN *(Into the phone)* What do you think?

JOE *(Coming back into the room)* I think someone tried to break in.

BEN *(Into the phone)* My father thinks someone tried to break in.

JOE I found footprints in the snow.

BEN *(Into the phone)* He found footprints in the snow.

SARAH My God, footprints in the snow.

JOE Close your robe, you want to catch cold? Go to bed. Look at you shivering.

SARAH I'm not cold. I'm scared. My God, someone tried to break in.

JOE Stop using God's name in vain.

SARAH It's not in vain. I'm really scared.

BEN *(Into the phone)* One second, please. *(To* JOE*)* They want to know if they should send somebody.

JOE No one got into the house.

BEN How can you tell?

JOE There's snow outside. There would be footprints on the rug.

SARAH There *are* footprints. *(Points)* Right there!

JOE *Those are mine!* Wasn't I just in the snow?

BEN Suppose he wore galoshes and left them outside?

JOE What kind of a robber wears galoshes? No one got in. Tell them never mind. Everything's all right. I'm going to look around again.

(He goes back out on the portico)

BEN *(Into the phone)* Hello? No one got in . . . Never mind, please. Everything's all right. My father's going to look around again . . . Thank you. We will. *(He hangs up)* Close your bathrobe.

JOE *(Comes back in)* Someone was here. He dropped these outside.

(He holds up a pair of steel-rimmed glasses)

BEN Eyeglasses!

SARAH Look, Daddy, it's a pair of eyeglasses!

JOE *Didn't I just find them?* I can see they're eyeglasses. Well, whoever dropped them won't get far without them. They're a half-inch thick—I can't see two feet through them.

SARAH A half-blind burglar, my God, it gives me the creeps.

(She shivers)

JOE I'm not going to tell you about God's name or your bathrobe again . . . I wouldn't be surprised if he broke both his legs. There are no footprints going down the stairs, so he must have jumped off the balcony.

BEN Jumped off the balcony? Forty feet? He'd break both his legs.

SARAH Oh God, a crippled blind burglar . . .

BEN Why don't we call the police? A crippled blind burglar shouldn't be too hard to find.

JOE First of all, he isn't a burglar because he didn't steal anything. And second of all, I don't want any police around here with your mother in the house. You know how frightened she is.

BEN But whoever it was could still be out there. He could be a dangerous lunatic.

SARAH He could be a rapist! . . . A *sexual* rapist! *(She closes her robe, which always falls open)*

BEN *All* rapists are sexual.

JOE *(Looks at her)* He can't see two feet ahead of him, who's he going to find to rape?

SARAH He could feel his way into the house.

BEN Not if he has two broken legs.

SARAH He could *crawl* and feel his way into the house.

JOE *(Yells)* People don't break into houses if they have to crawl and feel around . . . How would they ever get away?

SARAH A girl in my college was attacked by a man with one arm and one leg . . . They still can't figure out how he held her down.

JOE A nineteen-room house with priceless paintings, irreplaceable antiques and a half a million dollars in jewelry, who's going to stop for a rape? He's got other things on his mind.

SARAH What if rape was the thing he had on his mind?

JOE Will you stop talking about rape and close your bathrobe? Ben, take her upstairs. Go to bed, the both of you.

SARAH Yes, Daddy. Good night, Daddy.

BEN Good night, Dad.

JOE Wait a minute! Did you just hear something? . . . Listen!

(We hear a door screech open, then shut. They all look at each other)

JOE It's in the house.

BEN Someone's in the house!

SARAH Oh God, the rapist!

JOE *(Whispers)* Be quiet! Listen . . . footsteps!

SARAH Coming this way!

BEN Out in the hall!

SARAH Give them what they want, Daddy, don't let them do you-know-what.

JOE Get back, both of you. Near the wall!

(They all move back and pin themselves against the wall)

BEN The burglar alarm is off. We forgot to reset it.

JOE It's too late now.

BEN I could call them. What's the number?

JOE How should I know the number?

BEN Should I call information?

JOE Will you get back against the wall?

SARAH Oh God, I can just feel his hands on me now, his clammy hands rubbing all over me, up and down, up and down—

JOE No one's going to rub you up and down! Stop it! Grab something! *(They each pick up a vase)* The minute I hit him, call the police! Stand back! Here he

comes . . . Close your bathrobe! *(They all stand behind the door, and raise the vases over their heads, poised for action—and then the phone rings. They all turn and look at it) Now? Now* the phone rings?

BEN What a time for the phone to ring.

JOE Answer it! Answer it!
*(*BEN *runs over on tiptoe and answers the phone, still speaking in a soft voice)*

BEN Hello? . . . Yes? . . . Yes, this is the Benjamin residence—

JOE Who is it?

BEN *(Hand over the receiver, to* JOE*)* It's a woman. She's asking for Sidney.

JOE Sidney who?
(The vase is still poised over his head)

BEN *(Into the phone)* Sidney who, please? *(He nods. To* JOE*)* Sidney Lipton.

JOE There's no Sidney Lipton here. She's got the wrong number.

BEN *(Into the phone)* There's no Sidney Lipton here, madam. You've got the wrong number.

SARAH Hang up! Stop talking before the rapist goes away.

BEN *(Into the phone)* Just a minute. *(To* JOE*)* She says she's *Mrs.* Lipton. Her husband had an appointment here tonight . . . with you. *(*JOE *shakes his head "No" and shrugs.* BEN, *back into the phone)* My father doesn't know anything about it . . . Listen, Mrs. Lipton, this is a bad time for us to talk . . . We're expecting someone . . . Yes, I will . . . Thank you.

(He hangs up carefully, then rushes back to his spot against the wall. He doesn't say anything. JOE *stares at him)*

JOE Yes, you will what?

BEN Tell Sidney that his wife called.

SARAH Here he comes!

(They all stare at the foyer door. But it is the dining room door that opens, slowly, creaking—and a woman appears. It is ROSE BENJAMIN. *In her early fifties, she wears a silk robe, satin slippers, and tons of jewelry—pearls, rings, earrings, bracelets—a walking Harry Winstons. She walks slowly into the room, not noticing anything yet. Then she turns and sees the three poised against the wall, all with their "weapons" raised in the air. She just looks at them)*

ROSE *(Calmly)* What's wrong?

JOE *(Innocently)* Wrong? What could be wrong?

ROSE What?

JOE I said, "What could be wrong?"

ROSE I can't hear you. I have my earplugs in.

JOE Then take them *out!*

ROSE I can't hear you. I have my earplugs in.

JOE *(Yells)* NOTHING'S WRONG!

ROSE David's not home yet. I don't like it when David comes home so late. Tell him I want to speak to him in the morning, Joe. All right?

JOE Yes, Rose. I'll tell him.

ROSE I can't hear you. I have my earplugs in.

JOE I'LL TELL HIM!

ROSE Never mind. You tell him! I'm going to bed. Good night, Joe. Good night, children.

SARAH and BEN Good night, Mother.

ROSE You can at least say good night . . .
(She turns and exits)

JOE *(Relieved)* Ahhh!

SARAH and BEN Ahhh!

JOE I wonder if that was David?

BEN *(Puzzled)* No, Dad. It was Mother.

JOE *(Frowns at him)* Not just now. Before. Maybe he came home late again, drunk as usual, forgot his key and tried to get in through the French door.

BEN That's my guess. That sounds like David.

JOE All right, let's all go to bed. We've had enough for one night. I'll turn the alarm on.

SARAH *(Starting out)* I'll never sleep. I keep picturing some horrid man rubbing his clammy hands all over me, up and down, up and down . . .

JOE No one's going to rub you up and down.
(He turns the lights off and they all leave. The room is empty and dark, except for the moonlight pouring in through the windows. Suddenly a man appears on the portico. He wears a raincoat and a party hat. He wobbles, slightly drunk. He opens the French door and the alarm goes off, screaming through the house. He turns the lights on, then crosses to the other side, removing his raincoat. He wears an expensive tuxedo

jacket, silk lace shirt, black tie and, in contrast, filthy, torn blue jeans, with colorful appliqués, and old sneakers. JOE *rushes into the room, but he doesn't see* DAVID. *He dashes to the wall and turns the alarm off. Just as he turns,* DAVID *greets him—and* JOE *screams in terror)*

DAVID Hi, Dad!

JOE Oh! *(Then, relieved)* David—so it was you. Thank God! *(Then he slaps at* DAVID*'s shoulders)* Bum! Drunken bum! Rotten, good-for-nothing drunken bum!

DAVID Oh, good. For a minute I thought I was in the wrong house.

BEN *(Offstage)* Who is it, Dad?

JOE It's David, the bum.
*(*SARAH *and* BEN *enter)*

SARAH David!

BEN It's David.

DAVID Hi, kids. It's David.

JOE You want to scare us all to death? You want to give the three of us a heart attack?

DAVID A *triple* heart attack? I don't think it can be done, Dad.
(He wobbles)

JOE Look at him! Can't even stand up straight. Thank God your mother can't see you, she's got earplugs on.

DAVID How does that affect the eyes, Dad?

JOE Don't you talk back to me . . . I thought it was a burglar. Your brother thought it was a lunatic. Your sister was expecting a rapist.

DAVID Sorry, Sarah, what time were you expecting him?

JOE Go to your room! You hear me? You think you can find your room in your condition?

DAVID Why should my room be in my condition?

JOE Get him out! Get him out before I smack him one!

BEN Cool it, David. Dad is very upset.
*(*DAVID *sits on the end of a fireplace fender)*

SARAH Come to bed, David.

JOE A lot of help you'd be if we had a prowler out there now.

DAVID *(He points)* Oh, but we do. I saw something move out there.
(He falls into the fireplace)

JOE What! Someone's out there? You saw him?

SARAH And my bathrobe's open.

JOE *(Looks toward the window)* I knew it! I knew it!

BEN Dad knew it! He knew it!
*(*DAVID *goes over to the bottle of Scotch and pours a drink)*

SARAH Dad found his glasses on the porch.

BEN He's probably half blind!

DAVID Lucky dog!

JOE GET AWAY FROM THAT LIQUOR!

DAVID Sorry. Which liquor can I go near?

JOE You hear?

(They glare at each other. Suddenly MORRIS *and* MADY, *two middle-aged black domestics, appear in the room.)*

MORRIS Mr. Benjamin.

BEN Dad, it's Mady and Morris!

DAVID Looks like Mady and Morris.

MORRIS Mr. Benjamin, we heard the alarm. Is anything wrong?

JOE No, no, Morris. It was a mistake.

MORRIS Mady thought she saw something run past our window before.

MADY At first I thought it was a dog, but it bumped into a tree. Never saw a dog bump into a tree.

MORRIS Then she heard it call out in the dark.

JOE What'd it say, Mady?

MADY Sounded like "Ohh, my head." Never heard a dog say "Ohh, my head."

JOE No, no. It was probably just the wind.

MADY Never heard the wind say "Ohh, my head" either.

JOE It's nothing. Go back to bed. Don't say anything to Mrs. Benjamin in the morning.

MORRIS Yes, sir. Good night, Mr. Benjamin.

(They start out)

MADY It's gettin' dangerous around here. I don't like livin' in rich neighborhoods.

MORRIS Come on, Mady.

(They go)

DAVID She's right, Dad. Why don't you buy us a nice poor neighborhood so we'd all feel safer?

(He takes another drink. JOE *grabs the glass away from him)*

JOE Give me that. How many times have I told you we only drink in this house on holidays and special occasions?

DAVID If I guess right, can I have a drink?

JOE *I will not tolerate disrespect!*

DAVID I mean no disrespect. I apologize, Dad.

JOE An apology? From you? That's the first one I ever remember.

DAVID Ahh, a special occasion. That means I can have a drink.

(He goes over to the bar)

BEN Come on, David. Let's go to bed.

SARAH Please don't drink any more, David.

JOE *(To* DAVID*)* Why can't you be helpful? There's a professional burglar feeling his way around out there someplace . . . Keep away from this door. I'm going to find out what's going on. *(He opens the French door)* If he attacks me, call the police and try not to wake your mother.

BEN Careful, Dad.

SARAH Be careful, Daddy.

(JOE goes out on the portico; he pulls his robe collar up. We hear the cold wind blow)

BEN You think it's all right to let him go out there alone?

DAVID In his bathrobe and slippers? How much money could they get off him?

(He gets his usual from the bar)

JOE *(On the portico, calls out in slow, deliberate words . . . like two ships passing in the fog)* Hellooo? . . . Who's out there? *(Silence)* What do you want and where do you come from?

DAVID He expects him to give him his name and address.

(He pours himself one)

JOE *(Calling out again)* What is it you want? . . . If you're cold and want a drink, just say so . . .

DAVID So *that's* how you get one!

JOE *(Yelling out)* Can you see me? I have your glasses in my pocket. If your legs are broken, just crawl up to the house and we'll get you a doctor.

DAVID *(Drinks)* And you can pay us back a little bit each week.

SARAH *(Turns)* Listen! Someone's coming down the stairs.

BEN It's Mother. I hear her jewelry.

SARAH My God, what'll we do? She'll panic.

(The door opens and ROSE *reappears, clutching a huge jewel box to her bosom. There are so many jewels*

crammed into the box that necklaces, pearls and chains are overflowing it)

ROSE *(Quickly, nervously)* I heard noises. What were the noises? David, is that you? Yes, it's you. Where were you so late? Do you know you had me so worried? Why is everyone here? Is anything wrong? Where's your father? Why isn't your father here? What's happening? What's going on? What's all this about?

DAVID *(To* BEN*)* You answer the first six, I'll take the rest.

BEN *(To* DAVID*)* She can't hear you. She has earplugs in.

ROSE I can hear you. I don't have my earplugs in. Oh God, I feel weak. My jewel box is so heavy.

JOE *(Still on the terrace, calls out)* We know you're out there! Speak up, damnit, I'm losing patience.

ROSE Who's that? Is that your father? Who's your father talking to?

DAVID You mustn't worry, Mother. It's not another woman.

JOE *(Calling out)* All right, you want to freeze! Freeze! *(He comes back in, and closes the door)* Let 'em freeze!

ROSE Who's out there, Joe?

JOE *(To* BEN*)* Can she hear me? *(*BEN *nods)* No one. No one's out there!

ROSE You're keeping something from me, all of you. I demand to know what it is. I'm the woman of this house. David, Ben, Sarah, I'm your mother. Joe, I'm your wife.

DAVID We all know who you are, Mother.

JOE Rose, please. There's no point in upsetting you.

ROSE *(She sits)* I will not get upset. Why does everyone think I always get upset? I'm perfectly capable of handling a situation as long as I know what it is . . . *Now what is it?*

JOE Someone was trying to break into the house. *(Her head drops as if in a faint—but she never loses her grip on the jewel box)* Rose, Rose!

DAVID *(To the others)* You see? Why were you so worried about telling her?

JOE *(Rushes to her, slaps her wrist)* Rose, are you all right?

ROSE *(Screams)* *Agghh! My jewels!*

JOE It's me, Rose. Joe—the one who bought the jewels! It's all right.

ROSE In my house. A burglar in my house.

JOE *(Yells)* Okay, that's enough! *That's enough, everybody!* Do you hear me? One little alarm goes off and everybody goes crazy. There is nothing wrong here. We're locked in, we're safe, we're well protected, and I don't want to hear any more about it, you understand? I'm your father and that's final.

DAVID We all know who you are, Dad.

JOE *(Points an angry, angry finger)* *You,* I'll talk to later . . . Everybody else, up to bed. I'll turn the lights out.

ROSE *No!* That's what he's waiting for.

JOE Then I'll leave them *on.*

ROSE So he can see better? Are you crazy?

JOE You want me to call the police?

ROSE *Not* the police—they steal more than the crooks.

JOE Then what do you want, Rose? *What do you want?*

ROSE I want to know that we'll be safe in our beds tonight and that some lunatic isn't going to break into the house and cut our throats and steal my jewels, that's what I want.

SARAH And the "other thing." We don't want the "other thing" either, Daddy.

DAVID Why don't we call him in and see if we can negotiate a deal?

JOE Are you finished? All of you? Because I want to say something . . . No one is getting into this house tonight. No one is going to cut our throats, steal our jewels or do the "other thing." I guarantee it . . . but I can't promise it! Because whatever happens, happens. How we live and how we die is in the hands of our maker. We go to sleep and pray we get up in the morning. But if we don't, it's because it's God's will . . . *God's will,* do you understand? *Do you?*

ROSE Yes, Joe.

BEN and SARAH Yes, Daddy.

JOE Then say it!

ROSE, BEN and SARAH We understand! It's God's will!

JOE Thank you! I hope you all feel better . . . Now, let's go to bed.

DAVID And pray it ain't "God's will" tonight!

JOE *(To* DAVID*)* *You* stay! I've postponed that talk we're going to have later to *right now!* Everyone else upstairs.

SARAH Yes, Daddy . . . Good night, Daddy.
(She kisses him and goes out)

BEN Good night, Dad. And don't worry about anything. I just want you to know that you can count on me.
(He goes out)

JOE *(Turns to* DAVID*)* You hear? *That's* a son.

DAVID We all know who he is, Dad.

BEN *(Calls from the hall)* Come, Mother.

ROSE *(To* JOE*)* Don't stay down too long, Joe. Come to bed as soon as you're through yelling at David. *(To* DAVID*)* Good night, darling. Don't aggravate your father too late.
(She leaves. JOE *turns and looks at* DAVID*)*

JOE You want a drink? . . . Go ahead!

DAVID I beg your pardon.

JOE I said, "Have a drink." This is a special occasion . . . You and I are going to communicate with each other for the first time in our lives.

DAVID *(Goes to the bar, picks up a decanter, then puts it down without pouring it)* I can't do it.

JOE Why not?

DAVID It's only fun when you don't like it.

JOE Ohhh, David! David David David David David David David David David David David David David David David Da-vid David David David!

DAVID Are you talking to me, Dad?

JOE Yes . . . but *who* are you? Who *are* you, David? Do you know? Because I don't. I don't know who you are. Do *you* know who you are, David?

DAVID Just casually. I've seen me around the house.

JOE *That's* who you are . . . Quick with a flippant answer. Fresh, disrespectful, unambitious, lazy, no interests, no principles, no beliefs, no scruples, a drunkard, a gambler, a playboy, a lover, a bum, a television watcher and a lousy guitar player, that's who you are.

DAVID *(Smiles)* Ah, gee, Dad . . . you remembered!

JOE Last week I tried to make a list of all the things you do that make me proud . . . I didn't even take the top off the fountain pen. In high school, remember the Father and Son Picnic? I went alone. And what makes it so painful to me is that you're the smartest one in the family. You're the smartest one in *anybody's* family. Three college degrees, finished first in your class, and you didn't even show up for your senior year. So why do you throw it all away, David? Why do you drink so much?

DAVID To overcome this terrible condition I have.

JOE *(Concerned)* What condition?

DAVID Soberness! I get it a lot in the mornings. It's terrible—the room stands still, I can see everything clearly, I get single vision. And then I see the most

frightening things in this house . . . Money, money, money, money, money, money, money, money . . .

(This breaks DAVID *up)*

JOE Then why do you stay? Why don't you pack your bottles and leave this house?

DAVID I have tried on six separate occasions. But it's such a Goddamn long driveway, I never could make it to the gate . . . Sorry about the God reference.

JOE So you resent all this, is that it? You resent this house, my business, your mother's jewelry, our paintings, the furniture, the swimming pools, is that what you resent?

DAVID Don't forget our own Baskin-Robbins in the playhouse.

JOE Your sister likes ice cream—is that a crime? Is it a crime to be rich? Is it a sin to want only the best for your family?

DAVID I think a man is entitled to whatever he earns in this life. I do, however, think ninety-seven flavors is unnecessary.

JOE This house could go up in smoke tomorrow, I wouldn't blink an eye. I'll tell you something . . . There was a time in my life when the holes in my socks were so big, you could put them on from either end . . . I grew up in a tenement in New York. My mother, my father and eleven kids in one and a half rooms. We had two beds and a cot, you had to take a number off the wall to go to sleep . . . My father was five foot three, weighed a hundred and twenty-seven pounds. He had a bad heart, bad lungs, bad liver and bad kidneys. He was a piano

mover. He died at the age of thirty-two from an acute attack of everything . . . My mother had to take a job in a sweatshop working six days a week, fourteen hours a day. At night she washed floors at Madison Square Garden, and on Sundays she sold hot sweet potatoes on the corner of Fourteenth Street and Broadway. What she didn't sell was dinner for the rest of the week. Sweet potatoes every night. On Thanksgiving she'd stuff the sweet potato with a little white potato . . . The clothes we wore were made out of rags she found in the street, or a pair of curtains somebody threw away . . . You know what it is for a young boy growing up in a tough neighborhood in East New York to wear *curtains?* Can you picture that? *Fairies* used to beat me up . . . And through all those freezing winters and hot, hungry summers, through all the years of scrimping and scrubbing, through sicknesses without doctors or medicines—one winter we all had the whooping cough at the same time, eleven kids throwing up simultaneously in one and a half rooms—my mother nursed us on roller skates . . . through all that pain and heartache and suffering, she never complained or cried out against the world, because she knew it was God's will. That was the lesson my mother taught us. "What God has given, God can take away. And for what God has given you, be thankful" . . . When I was fourteen years old I went to work for the Schreiber Corrugated Box Company. A rotten man who made a rotten box. No matter how you packed it, the minute you shipped it, it fell apart. It didn't hold up under any kind of weather—including sunshine. Because Schreiber was interested in a quick profit, not workmanship, not quality. When I bought the business from him in 1942 with six thousand dollars my mother saved,

I started to make quality boxes, strong as steel. In the first three months I lost my mother's six thousand dollars. "It's God's will," she kept telling me. And then suddenly business began to pick up. From nowhere, from *everywhere*, people were buying my corrugated boxes. It was like a miracle. The money kept pouring in. I couldn't find banks fast enough to keep it . . . My mother never lived to enjoy my success . . . On the day I made my first million dollars, she died peacefully in her sleep on the BMT subway. Her last words to the conductor were "If God wanted me to live, I would have taken the bus today" . . . All I wanted for my wife and children was not to suffer the way I did as a child, not to be deprived of life's barest necessities. But such riches, such wealth? I never asked for it, I never needed it. But when I ask myself, "Why so much? Why all this?" I hear the voice of my mother say, "It's God's will" . . . I give half of what I have every year to charity, and the next year I make twice as much. Wealth is as much a responsibility as poverty is a burden. I'll accept whatever is given to me and ask for no more or no less . . . Can you understand this, David? Does anything I've said to you tonight make any sense at all? *(*DAVID *snores)* He's sleeping! Why do you torture me? Why do you twist my heart around like a pretzel? Where is your faith, David? Have I brought you up without faith, or have you just lost it?

DAVID If you want, I'll look in my closet in the morning . . .

JOE I would give away everything I have in this world if I could just hear you say, "Dear God in heaven, I believe in you."

DAVID Listen, I'm willing to discuss it with the man . . . You know his number, call him.

*(*DAVID *gets a whiskey bottle, and heads back to the door)*

JOE Oh, David, David. The son who doesn't believe is the father's greatest anguish. Do you know what it says in the Bible, David?

DAVID Yes, Dad . . . "This book belongs to the Sheraton-Plaza Hotel." Good night, Dad.

(He goes out. JOE *stands there, forlorn and defeated. He sighs a mournful sigh. Then he moves to the switch and turns off the lights. The room is in darkness except for the moonlight shining in through the French door. He looks up and speaks softly and reverently)*

JOE Am I wrong? . . . Is all of this too much for one family? If it is, then why did You give it to me? It's enough already, dear Lord. Don't give me any more . . . Just David. Give me back my David . . . If it be Your Will, dear God, that's all I ask . . . Amen!

(A voice, from somewhere in the room itself, is heard)

VOICE Amen!

*(*JOE *stops in his tracks, then wheels around)*

JOE *(Shocked) What?* Who's there? Who said that?

VOICE Don't worry. It's not who you're thinking.

JOE Who is it? I can't see you.

VOICE I can't see you either. I lost my glasses. Are the lights on or off?

JOE You! The one who tried to break in! It's *you*, isn't it?

VOICE Certainly it's me. Are we inside or outside? I can't see a damn thing.

JOE Stay where you are! Don't move. I could have the police here in two minutes.

VOICE You're lucky. In my neighborhood you could wait for them all night . . . Would you please turn the lights on? I get very nervous in the dark.

JOE Don't you try anything funny.

VOICE I'm not here to get laughs.

(Suddenly the lights blaze on. JOE *is standing with his hand on the switch. He wheels around to face the night visitor)*

JOE All right, now who do you-– *(But there is no one there)* Where are you? . . . WHERE ARE YOU?

(He turns around quickly . . . Silence. From behind the huge sofa, SIDNEY LIPTON *appears on all fours, crawling and feeling the rug with his hands)*

LIPTON Don't get excited, I'm just looking for my glasses. *(He continues to search. He is not a very impressive-looking person. He wears khaki slacks, a thin raincoat, white sweat socks, Hush Puppies, a tweed cap—a potpourri of cheap clothes)* You think the light helps? I still can't see. Where am I, on the floor?

JOE What do you mean by breaking into my house? Who are you?

LIPTON *(Still feeling around on the floor)* Oh, gorgeous rug. This is all handwoven. Must have cost a fortune. What is it, Persian?

JOE Never mind the rug, I asked you a question. Who are you?

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?

JOE Are you selling something? If you're a salesman I'll kill you with my bare hands!

LIPTON Do I look like a salesman? Do I look like a man who deals in goods and hardware? I am a man of flair, of fancy, a bizarre and unique guide to the world beyond our world, a companion into wild and soaring flights beyond human comprehension.

JOE A travel agent? Is that what you are, a travel agent?

LIPTON *(Yells, angrily) You have no imagination!* I am trying to jazz this up. I have a wonderful sense of the theatrical, and you keep pulling my curtain down. What do I have to do to tell you who I am? Think, Joe, think!

JOE I think you're a *nut*, that's what I think, and I want you out! *(He grabs* LIPTON *by the arm)* Out, do you hear me? OUT!

LIPTON Easy, easy. No rough stuff, I'm not a physical person.

JOE Ten seconds and I throw you out that window head-first. One, two—

LIPTON Don't force my hand. I deal a heavy hand—

JOE Three, four—

LIPTON *(Stops; points a long finger) STAY! I STAY YOU!* Yea, you would banish He who brings thee the gift of life and the eternal bliss of the joyful soul? . . . Forget that! Forget I said that. That was a slip. A boo-boo. Slipsies! I have a charley horse in the middle of my temple. Does Bengué work on the head?

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