

Three Knocks

“Every little moment has meaning all its own.” – Sanford Meisner

From Sanford Meisner on Acting

“I’m going to show you a brand-new thin. Years ago, before you were born, there was a show called *Florodora*, and there was a song in it entitled ‘Every Little Movement Has a Meaning All Its Own.’ Now, I changed that a bit to say, ‘Every Little *Moment* Has a Meaning All Its Own.’ You sort of know that already, don’t you? All right, now. A knock . . . a knock has a meaning. Follow this carefully. **A knock has a meaning.** John, go outside and knock---truthfully---and then with ten seconds and knock a second time with a second meaning. Then knock a third time.”

“Three different meanings?”

“Right. Ralph, you tell me what each knock means to you.”

There is a quiet rap on the door.

“Is anybody there?” Ralph says.

“No, it was timid. Call it timid.”

Then there is an emphatic, rapid knock.

“Nervous,” Ralph says. “He sounds nervous.”

“All right.”

Finally there is a huge, booming knock.

“Angry, really loud---”

“All right, call him in.”

John reappears.

“John---everybody---knock so that it has some resemblance to life. Don’t knock theatrically. Your last knock was on the verge of being theatrical. Do you understand?”

John nods his head.

“Now here’s the catch. The first moment of the exercise is the knock. The exercise begins with the knock. The second moment is the opening of the door, and the third moment is your interpretation of the knock. The third moment is the meaning the knock has for you, verbalized by you as you open the door. Right? Then you go back to what you’re doing. Do whatever the third moment permits you to do and then go back to your independent activity and let the exercise continue.”

Ralph seems puzzled.

“Let’s go over the knocking,” Meisner says. “After the first two, tell me what they mean to you. After the third one, open the door. And use---verbally---what the third knock meant to you. Then go back to your independent activity and the exercise. Any questions?”

“I understand the order of it,” Ralph says, “but if you were doing the activity and didn’t want to be interrupted---”

“Then don’t interrupt---”

“No, you’re doing the activity and you *have* to open the door, right?”

“No!” Meisner exclaims.

“Okay, that makes it clear.”

“No! You understand?”

“Yeah---”

“No! You understand?”

“I understand. Yes.”

“Yes? Tell me why.”

“‘You don’t do something until---’ ”

“Okay. You understand.”