

**BERNARD.** ...Hello?

**MICHAEL.** One point.

*(He efficiently takes note on the pad.)*

**BERNARD.** Who's speaking? Oh...Mrs. Dahlbeck.

**MICHAEL.** *(Taking note.)* One point.

**BERNARD.** ...It's Bernard - Francine's boy.

**EMORY.** Son, not boy.

**BERNARD.** ...How are you? Good. Good. Oh, just fine, thank you. Mrs. Dahlbeck...is...Peter...at home? Oh. Oh, I see.

**MICHAEL.** *(Shakes his head.)* Shhhhiiii...

**BERNARD.** ...Oh, no. No, it's nothing important. I just wanted to...to tell him...that...to tell him... I... I...

**MICHAEL.** *(Prompting flatly.)* I love him. That I've always loved him.

**BERNARD.** ...That I was sorry to hear about him and his wife.

**MICHAEL.** No points!

**BERNARD.** ...My mother wrote me. Yes. It is. It really is. Well. Would you just tell him I called and said...that I was...just...very, very sorry to hear and I...hope...they can get everything straightened out. Yes. Yes. Well, good night. Goodbye.

*(He hangs up slowly. MICHAEL draws a definite line across his pad, makes a definite period.)*

**MICHAEL.** Two points total. Terrible. Next!

*(MICHAEL whisks the phone out of BERNARD's hands, gives it to EMORY.)*

**EMORY.** Are you all right, Bernard?

**BERNARD.** *(Almost to himself.)* Why did I call? Why did I do that?

**LARRY.** *(To BERNARD.)* Where was he?

**BERNARD.** Out on a date.

**MICHAEL.** Come on, Emory. Punch in.

*(EMORY picks up the phone, dials information. A beat.)*

**EMORY.** Could I have a number, please - in the Bronx - for a Delbert Botts.

**LARRY.** A Delbert Botts! How many can there be!

**BERNARD.** Oh, I wish I hadn't called now.

**EMORY.** ...No, the residence number, please.

*(Waves his hand at MICHAEL, signaling for the pencil. MICHAEL hands it to him.)*

...Thank you.

*(A beat. And he indignantly slams down the receiver.)*

I do wish information would stop calling me "Ma'am"!

**LARRY.** Who the hell is Delbert Botts?

**EMORY.** The one person I have always loved.

*(To MICHAEL.)* That's who you said call, isn't it?

**MICHAEL.** That's right, Emory Board.

**LARRY.** How could you love somebody with a name like that?

**MICHAEL.** Yes, Emory, you couldn't love anybody with a name like that. It wouldn't look good on a place card. Isn't that right, Alan?

*(MICHAEL slaps ALAN on the shoulder. ALAN is silent. MICHAEL snickers.)*

**EMORY.** I admit his name is not so good - but he is absolutely beautiful. At least, he was when I was in high school. Of course, I haven't seen him since and he was about seven years older than I even then.

**MICHAEL.** Christ, you better call him quick before he dies.

**EMORY.** I've loved him ever since the first day I laid eyes on him, which was when I was in the fifth grade and he was a senior. Then, he went away to college and by the time he got out I was in high school, and he had become a dentist.

**MICHAEL.** *(With incredulous disgust.)* A dentist!

**EMORY.** Yes. Delbert Botts, D.D.S. And he opened his office in a bank building.

**HAROLD.** And you went and had every tooth in your head pulled out, right?

**EMORY.** No. I just had my teeth cleaned, that's all.

*(DONALD turns from the bar with two drinks in his hands.)*

**BERNARD.** *(To himself.)* Oh, I shouldn't have called.

**MICHAEL.** Will you shut up, Bernard! And take your boring, sleep-making icks somewhere else. *Go!*

*(MICHAEL extends a pointed finger toward the steps. BERNARD takes the wine bottle and his glass and moves toward the stairs, pouring himself another drink on the way.)*

**EMORY.** I remember I looked right into his eyes the whole time, and I kept wanting to bite his fingers.

**HAROLD.** Well, it's absolutely mind-boggling.

**MICHAEL.** Phyllis Phallic.

**HAROLD.** It absolutely boggles the mind.

*(DONALD brings one of the drinks to ALAN. ALAN take it, drinks it down.)*

**EMORY.** ...I told him I was having my teeth cleaned for the Junior-Senior Prom, for which I was in charge of decorations. I told him it was a celestial theme and I was cutting stars out of tinfoil and making clouds out of chicken wire and angel's hair.

*(A beat.)*

He couldn't have been less impressed.

**COWBOY.** I got angel's hair down my shirt once at Christmastime. Gosh, did it itch!

**EMORY.** ...I told him I was going to burn incense in pots so that white fog would hover over the dance floor, and it would look like heaven.

**COWBOY.** ...And it made little tiny cuts in the creases of my fingers. Man, did they sting! It would be terrible if you got that stuff in your...

*(MICHAEL circles slowly toward him.)*

I'll be quiet.

**EMORY.** He was engaged to this stupid-ass girl named Loraine whose mother was truly a real "see-you-next-Tuesday"!

**MICHAEL.** Don't digress.

**EMORY.** Well, anyway, I was a wreck. I mean a total mess. I couldn't eat, sleep, stand up, sit down, *nothing*. I could hardly cut out silver stars or finish the clouds for the prom. So I called him on the telephone and asked if I could see him alone.

**HAROLD.** Clearly not the coolest of moves.

*(DONALD looks at ALAN. ALAN looks away.)*

**EMORY.** He said okay and told me to come by his house. I was so nervous my hands were shaking and my voice was unsteady. I couldn't look at him this time - I just stared straight in space and blurted out why I'd come. I told him...I wanted him to be my friend. I said that I had never had a friend who I could talk to and tell everything and trust. I asked him if he would be my friend.

**COWBOY.** You poor bastard.

**MICHAEL.** SHHHHHH!

**BERNARD.** What'd he say?

**EMORY.** He said he would be glad to be my friend. And any time I ever wanted to see him or call him - to just call him and he'd see me. And he shook my trembling wet hand, and I left on a cloud.

**MICHAEL.** One of the ones you made yourself.

**EMORY.** And the next day I went and bought him a gold-plated cigarette lighter and had his initials monogrammed on it and wrote a card that said, "From your friend, Emory."

**HAROLD.** Seventeen years old and already big with the gifts.

**EMORY.** ...And then the night of the prom I found out.

**BERNARD.** Found out what?

**EMORY.** I heard two girls I knew giggling together. They were standing behind some goddamn corrugated-cardboard Greek columns I had borrowed from a department store and had draped with yards and yards of goddamn cheesecloth. Oh, Mary, it takes a fairy to make something pretty.

**MICHAEL.** *Don't digress.*

**EMORY.** This girl who was telling the story said she had heard it from her mother – and her mother had heard it from Loraine's mother.

(*To MICHAEL.*) You see, Loraine and her mother were not beside the point.

(*Back to the group.*)

Obviously, Del had told Loraine about my calling and about the gift.

(*A beat.*)

Pretty soon everybody at the dance had heard about it, and they were laughing and making jokes. Everybody knew that I had a crush on Doctor Delbert Botts and that I had asked him to be my friend.

(*A beat.*)

What they didn't know was that I *loved* him. And that I would go on loving him years after they had all forgotten my funny secret.

(*Pause.*)

**HAROLD.** Well, I for one need an insulin injection.

**MICHAEL.** *Call him.*

**BERNARD.** Don't, Emory.

**MICHAEL.** Since when are you telling him what to do!

**EMORY.** (*To BERNARD.*) What do I care – I'm pissed! I'll do anything. Three times.

**BERNARD.** Don't. *Please!*

**MICHAEL.** I said call him.

**BERNARD.** Don't! You'll be sorry. Take my word for it.

**EMORY.** What have I got to lose?

**BERNARD.** Your dignity. That's what you've got to lose.

**MICHAEL.** Well, *that's* a knee-slapper! I love *your* telling *him* about dignity when you allow him to degrade you constantly by Uncle Tom-ing you to death.

**BERNARD.** *He* can do it, Michael. *I* can do it. But *you can't* do it.

**MICHAEL.** Isn't that discrimination?

**BERNARD.** I don't like it from him and I don't like it from me – but I do it to myself and I let him do it. I let him do it because it's the only thing that, to him, makes him my equal. We both got the short end of the stick – but I got a hell of a lot more than he did and he knows it. I let him Uncle Tom me just so he can tell himself he's not a complete loser.

**MICHAEL.** How very considerate.

**BERNARD.** *It's his defense. You have your defense, Michael. But it's indescribable.*

**MICHAEL.** (*To BERNARD.*) Y'all want to hear a little polite parlor jest from the liberal Deep South? Do you know why *Nigras* have such big lips? Because they're always going "P-p-p-p-a-a-a-h!"

(*The labial noise is exasperating with lazy disgust as he shuffles about the room.*)

**DONALD.** Christ, Michael!

(*MICHAEL unsuccessfully tries to tear the phone away from EMORY.*)

**MICHAEL.** I can do without your goddamn tears all over my telephone, you nellie coward.

**EMORY.** I may be nellie, but I'm no coward.

(*He starts to dial.*)