

DONALD. I don't know. Who *was* it who always used to say that?

MICHAEL. (*Katharine Hepburn voice.*) I don't know. Somebody.

LARRY. (*To COWBOY.*) What does your card say?

COWBOY. (*Holds up his wrist.*) Here. Read it.

LARRY. (*Reading card.*) "Dear Harold, bang, bang, you're alive. But roll over and play dead. Happy birthday, Emory."

BERNARD. Ah, sheer poetry, Emmy.

LARRY. And in your usual good taste.

MICHAEL. Yes, so conservative of you to resist a sign in Times Square.

EMORY. (*Glancing toward stairs.*) Cheese it! Here comes the socialite nun.

MICHAEL. Goddamn it, Emory!

(*ALAN comes down the stairs into the room. Everybody quiets.*)

ALAN. Well, I'm off... Thanks, Michael, for the drink.

MICHAEL. You're entirely welcome, Alan. See you tomorrow?

ALAN. ...No. No, I think I'm going to be awfully busy. I may even go back to Washington.

EMORY. Got a heavy date in Lafayette Square?

ALAN. What?

HANK. Emory.

EMORY. Forget it.

ALAN. (*Sees COWBOY.*) Are you...Harold?

EMORY. No, he's not Harold. He's *for* Harold.

(*Silence. ALAN lets it pass. Turns to HANK.*)

ALAN. Goodbye, Hank. It was nice to meet you.

HANK. Same here.

(*They shake hands.*)

ALAN. If...if you're ever in Washington - I'd like for you to meet my wife.

LARRY. That'd be fun, wouldn't it, Hank?

EMORY. Yeah, they'd love to meet him - *her*. I have such a problem with pronouns.

ALAN. (*Quick, to EMORY.*) How many esses are there in the word pronoun?

EMORY. How'd you like to kiss my ass - that's got two or more *essessss* in it!

ALAN. How'd you like to blow me!

EMORY. What's the matter with your *wife*, she got lockjaw?

ALAN. (*Lashes out.*) Faggot, fairy, pansy...

(*Lunges at EMORY.*)

...queer, cocksucker! I'll kill you, you goddamn little mincing swish! You goddamn freak! FREAK! FREAK!

(*Pandemonium. ALAN beats EMORY to the floor.*)

EMORY. Oh, my God, somebody help me! Bernard! He's killing me!

(*BERNARD and HANK rush forward. EMORY is screaming. Blood gushes from his nose.*)

HANK. Alan! ALAN! ALAN!

EMORY. Get him off me! Get him off me! Oh, my God, he's broken my nose! I'm BLEEDING TO DEATH!

(*LARRY has gone to shut the door. With one great, athletic move, HANK forcefully tears ALAN off EMORY and drags him backward across the room. BERNARD bends over EMORY, puts his arm around him, and lifts him.*)

BERNARD. Somebody get some ice! And a cloth!

(*LARRY runs to the bar, grabs the bar towel and the ice bucket. BERNARD quickly wraps some ice in the towel, holds it to EMORY's mouth.*)

EMORY. Oh, my face!

BERNARD. He busted your lip, that's all. It'll be all right.

(HANK has gotten ALAN down on the floor on the opposite side of the room. ALAN relinquishes the struggle, collapses against HANK, moaning and beating his fists rhythmically against HANK's chest. MICHAEL is still standing in the same spot in the center of the room, immobile. DONALD crosses past the COWBOY.)

DONALD. *(To COWBOY.)* Would you mind waiting over there with the gifts?

(COWBOY moves over to where the gift-wrapped packages have been put. DONALD continues past to observe the mayhem, turns up his glass, takes a long swallow. The door buzzes, DONALD turns toward MICHAEL, waits. MICHAEL doesn't move. DONALD goes to the door, opens it to reveal HAROLD.)

Well, Harold! Happy birthday. You're just in time for the floor show, which, as you see, is on the floor.

(To COWBOY.) Hey, you, *this* is Harold!

(HAROLD looks blankly toward MICHAEL. MICHAEL looks back blankly.)

COWBOY. *(Crossing to HAROLD.)*

HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU,
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU,
HAPPY BIRTHDAY, DEAR HAROLD.
HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU.

(Throws his arms around HAROLD and gives him a big kiss. DONALD looks toward MICHAEL, who observes this stoically. HAROLD breaks away from COWBOY, reads the card, begins to laugh. MICHAEL turns to survey the room. DONALD watches him. Slowly, MICHAEL begins to move. Walks over to the bar, pours a

glass of gin, raises it to his lips, downs it all. DONALD watches silently as HAROLD laughs and laugh and laughs. MICHAEL, still at the bar, lowers his glass, turns to HAROLD.)

MICHAEL. What's so fucking funny?

HAROLD. *(Unintimidated. Quick hand to hip.)* Life. Life is a goddamn laff-riot. You remember life.

MICHAEL. *You're stoned.*

LARRY. Happy birthday, Harold.

MICHAEL. *(To HAROLD.)* You're stoned and you're late! You were supposed to arrive at this location at approximately eight-thirty dash nine o'clock!

HAROLD. What I *am*, Michael, is a thirty-two-year-old, ugly, pockmarked Jew fairy – and if it takes me a while to pull myself together and if I smoke a little grass before I can get up the nerve to show this face to the world, it's nobody's goddamn business but my own.

(Instant switch to chatty tone.)

And how are *you* this evening?

(HANK lifts ALAN to the couch. MICHAEL turns away from HAROLD, pours himself another drink. DONALD watches. HAROLD sweeps past MICHAEL over to where BERNARD is helping EMORY up off the floor. LARRY returns the bucket to the bar. MICHAEL puts some ice in his drink.)

EMORY. Happy birthday, Hallie.

HAROLD. What happened to *you*?

EMORY. *(Groans.)* Don't ask!

HAROLD. Your lips are turning blue; you look like you been rimming a snowman.

EMORY. That piss-elegant kooze hit me!

(He indicates ALAN. HAROLD looks toward the couch. ALAN has slumped his head forward into his own lap.)

MICHAEL. Careful, Emory, that kind of talk just makes him s'nervous.

(ALAN covers his ears with his hands.)

HAROLD. Who is she? Who was she? Who does she hope to be?

EMORY. Who knows, who cares!

HANK. His name is Alan McCarthy.

MICHAEL. Do forgive me for not formally introducing you.

HAROLD. *(Sarcastically, to MICHAEL.)* Not the famous college chum.

MICHAEL. *(Takes an ice cube out of his glass and throws it at HAROLD.)* Do a figure eight on that.

HAROLD. And in black tie, too. Is this my surprise from you, Michael?

LARRY. I think Alan is the one who got the surprise.

DONALD. And, if you'll notice, he's absolutely speechless.

EMORY. I *hope* she's in *shock*! She's a beast!

COWBOY. *(Indicating ALAN.)* Is it his birthday, too?

EMORY. *(Indicates COWBOY to HAROLD.)* That's your surprise.

LARRY. Speaking of beasts.

EMORY. From me to you, darlin'. How do you like it?

HAROLD. Oh, I suppose he has an interesting face and body – but it turns me right off because he can't talk intelligently about art.

EMORY. Yeah, ain't it a shame.

HAROLD. I could never *love* anyone like that.

EMORY. Never. *Who could?*

HAROLD. *I* could and *you* could, that's who could! Oh, Mary, she's *gorgeous*!

EMORY. She may be dumb, but she's all yours!

HAROLD. In affairs of the heart, there are no rules! I think my present is a super-surprise. I'm so thrilled to get it I'd kiss you, but I don't want to get blood all over me.

EMORY. Ohhh, look at my sweater!

HAROLD. Wait'll you see your face.

BERNARD. Come on, Emory, let's clean you up. Happy birthday, Harold.

HAROLD. (*Smiles.*) Thanks, love.

EMORY. My sweater is ruined!

MICHAEL. (*From the kitchen.*) Take one of mine in the bedroom.

DONALD. The one on the floor is vicuña.

BERNARD. (*To EMORY.*) You'll feel better after I bathe your face.

(**BERNARD** leads **EMORY** up the stairs.)

HAROLD. Just another birthday party with the folks.

(**MICHAEL** returns with a wine bottle and a green-crystal white-wine glass, pouring en route.)

MICHAEL. Here's a cold bottle of Pouilly-Fuissé I bought especially for you, kiddo.

HAROLD. Pussycat, all is forgiven. You can stay. No. You can stay, but not all is forgiven. Cheers.

MICHAEL. I didn't want it this way, Hallie.

HAROLD. (*Indicating ALAN.*) Who asked Mr. Right to celebrate my birthday?

DONALD. There are no accidents.

HAROLD. (*Referring to DONALD.*) And who asked *him*?

MICHAEL. *Guilty again.* When I make problems for myself, I go the whole route.

HAROLD. Always got to have your crutch, haven't you?

DONALD. I'm *not* leaving.

(*He goes to the bar, makes himself another martini.*)

HAROLD. Nobody ever thinks completely of somebody else. They always please themselves; they always cheat, if only a little bit.

LARRY. (*Referring to ALAN.*) Why is he sitting there with his hands over his ears?

DONALD. I think he has an ick.

(DONALD looks at MICHAEL. MICHAEL returns the look, steely.)

HANK. *(To ALAN.)* Can I get you a drink?

LARRY. How can he hear you, dummy, with his hands over his ears?

HAROLD. He can hear every word. In fact, he wouldn't miss a word if it killed him.

(ALAN removes his hands from his ears.)

What'd I tell you?

ALAN. I... I...feel sick. I think...I'm going to...throw up.

HAROLD. Say that again, and I won't have to take my appetite depressant.

(ALAN looks desperately toward HANK.)

HANK. Hang on.

(HANK pulls ALAN's arm around his neck, lifts him up, takes him up the stairs.)

HAROLD. Easy does it. One step at a time.

(BERNARD and EMORY come out of the bath.)

BERNARD. There. Feel better?

EMORY. Oh, Mary, what would I do without you?

(Looks at himself in the mirror.)

I am not ready for my close-up, Mr. DeMille. Nor will I be for the next two weeks.

(BERNARD picks up Michael's sweater off the floor. HANK and ALAN are midway up the stairs.)

ALAN. I'm going to throw up! Let me go! Let me go!

(Tears loose of HANK, bolts up the remainder of the stairs. He and EMORY meet head-on. EMORY screams.)

EMORY. Oh, my God, he's after me again!

(EMORY recoils as ALAN whizzes past into the bathroom, slamming the door behind him. HANK has reached the bedroom.)

HANK. He's sick.

BERNARD. Yeah, sick in the head. Here, Emory, put this on.

EMORY. Oh, Mary, take me home. My nerves can't stand any more of this tonight.

(EMORY takes the vicuña sweater from BERNARD, starts to put it on. Downstairs, HAROLD flamboyantly takes out a cigarette, takes a kitchen match from a striker, steps up on the seat of the couch, and sits on the back of it.)

HAROLD. TURNING ON!

(With that, he strikes the match on the sole of his shoe and lights up. Through a strained throat:)

Anybody care to join me?

(He waves the cigarette in a slow pass.)

MICHAEL. Many thanks, no.

(HAROLD passes it to LARRY, who nods negatively.)

DONALD. No, thank you.

HAROLD. *(To COWBOY.)* How about you, Tex?

COWBOY. Yeah.

(COWBOY takes the cigarette, makes some audible inhalations through his teeth. EMORY and BERNARD come down the stairs.)

EMORY. Michael, I left the casserole in the oven. You can take it out anytime.

MICHAEL. You're not going.

EMORY. I couldn't eat now anyway.

HAROLD. Well, *I'm* absolutely ravenous. I'm going to eat until I have a fat attack.

MICHAEL. (*To EMORY.*) I said, you're *not going*.

HAROLD. (*To MICHAEL.*) Having a cocktail this evening, are we? In my honor?

EMORY. It's your favorite dinner, Hallie. I made it myself.

BERNARD. *Who* fixed the casserole?

EMORY. Well, *I* made the sauce!

BERNARD. Well, *I* made the salad!

LARRY. Girls, please.

MICHAEL. Please *what!*

HAROLD. Beware the hostile fag. When he's sober, he's dangerous. When he drinks, he's lethal.

MICHAEL. (*Referring to HAROLD.*) Attention must *not* be paid.

HAROLD. I'm starved, Em, I'm ready for some of your Alice B. Toklas's opium-baked lasagna.

EMORY. Are you really? Oh, that makes me so pleased, maybe I'll just serve it before I leave.

MICHAEL. *You're not leaving.*

BERNARD. I'll help.

LARRY. I better help, too. We don't need a nosebleed in the lasagna.

BERNARD. When the sauce is on it, you wouldn't be able to tell the difference anyway.

(**EMORY, BERNARD, and LARRY** *exit to the kitchen.*)

MICHAEL. (*Proclamation.*) Nobody's going anywhere!

HAROLD. You are going to have schmerz tomorrow you wouldn't believe.

MICHAEL. May I kiss the hem of your schmatta, Doctor Freud?

HAROLD. I am turning on, and you are just turning.

(**HANK** *comes down the stairs.*)

HANK. Michael, is there any air spray?

HAROLD. Hair spray! You're supposed to be holding his head, not doing his hair.

HANK. *Air* spray, not *hair* spray.

MICHAEL. There's a can of floral spray right on top of the john.

HANK. Thanks.

HAROLD. I keep my grass in the medicine cabinet. In a Band-Aid box. Somebody told me it's the safest place. If the cops arrive, you can always lock yourself in the bathroom and flush it down the john.

DONALD. *Very cagey.*

HAROLD. It makes more sense than where I *was* keeping it – in an oregano jar in the spice rack. I kept forgetting and accidentally turning my hateful mother on with the salad.

(A beat.)

But I think she liked it. No matter what meal she comes over for – even if it's breakfast – she says, "Let's have a salad!"

(COWBOY laughs out loud, provoking MICHAEL.)

MICHAEL. You are definitely the type who still moves his lips when he reads, and who sits in a steam room and says things like, "Hot enough for you?"

COWBOY. I never use the steam room when I go to the gym. It's bad after a workout. It flattens you down.

MICHAEL. Just after you've broken your back to blow yourself up like a poisoned dog.

COWBOY. Yeah.

MICHAEL. You're right, Harold. Not only can he not talk intelligently about art, he can't even follow from one sentence to the next.

HAROLD. *But he's beautiful.* He has *unnatural* natural beauty.

(Quick palm upheld.)

Not that that means anything.

MICHAEL. It doesn't mean *everything*.

HAROLD. Keep telling yourself that as your hair drops out in handfuls.

(Quick palm upheld.)

Not that it's not *natural* for one's hair to recede as one reaches seniority.

MICHAEL. Faggots are worse than women about their age. They think their lives are over at thirty. Physical beauty is not that goddamned important!

HAROLD. Of course not. How could it be – it's only in the eye of the beholder.

MICHAEL. And it's only skin deep – don't forget that one.

HAROLD. Oh, no, I haven't forgotten that one at all. It's only skin deep and it's *transitory*, too. It's *terribly* transitory. I mean, how long does it last – thirty or forty or fifty years at the most – depending on how well you take care of yourself. And not counting, of course, that you might die before it runs out anyway. Yes, it's too bad about this poor boy's face. It's tragic. He's absolutely cursed!

(Takes COWBOY's face in his hands.)

How can *his* beauty ever compare with *my* soul? And although I have never seen my soul, I understand from my mother's rabbi that it's a knockout. I, however, cannot seem to locate it for a gander. And if I could, I'd sell it in a flash for some skin-deep, transitory, meaningless beauty!

(ALAN walks weakly into the bedroom and sits on the bed. Downstairs, LARRY enters from the kitchen with salad plates. HANK comes into the bedroom and turns out the lamps. ALAN lies down. Now, only the light from the bathroom and the stairwell illuminates the room.)

MICHAEL. *(Makes sign of the cross with his drink hand.)*
Forgive him, Father, for he know not what he do.

(HANK stands still in the half-darkness.)

HAROLD. Michael, you kill me. You don't know what side of the fence you're on. If somebody says something pro-religion, you're against them. If somebody denies God, you're against *them*. One might say that you have some problem in that area. You can't live with it, and you can't live without it.

(EMORY barges through the swinging door, carrying the casserole.)

EMORY. Hot stuff! Comin' through!

MICHAEL. *(To EMORY.)* One could murder you with very little effort.

HAROLD. *(To MICHAEL.)* You hang on to that great insurance policy called The Church.

MICHAEL. That's right. I believe in God, and if it turns out that there really isn't one, okay. Nothing lost. But if it turns out that there *is* – I'm covered.

(BERNARD enters, carrying a huge salad bowl. He puts it down, lights table candles.)

EMORY. *(To MICHAEL.)* Harriet Hypocrite, that's who you are.

MICHAEL. Right. I'm one of those truly rotten Catholics who gets drunk, sins all night, and goes to Mass the next morning.

EMORY. Gilda Guilt. It depends on what you think sin is.

MICHAEL. Would you just shut up your goddamn minty mouth and get back to the goddamn kitchen!

EMORY. Say anything you want – *just don't hit me!*

(He exits. A beat. HANK comes down the stairs.)

LARRY. *(To HANK.)* Well, is it bigger than a breadstick?

HANK. *(Ignores remark. To MICHAEL.)* He's lying down for a minute.

HAROLD. How does the bathroom smell?

HANK. Better.

MICHAEL. Before it smelled like somebody puked. Now it smells like somebody puked in a gardenia patch.

LARRY. And how does the big hero feel?

HANK. Lay off, will you?

(EMORY enters with a basket of napkin-covered rolls, deposits them on the table.)

EMORY. *Dinner is served!*

(HAROLD comes to the buffet table.)

HAROLD. Emory, it looks absolutely fabulous.

EMORY. I'd make somebody a good wife.

(EMORY serves pasta. BERNARD serves the salad, pours wine. MICHAEL goes to the bar, makes another drink. HANK comes up to the table.)

What would you like, big boy?

LARRY. Alan McCarthy, and don't hold the mayo.

EMORY. I can't keep up with you two –

(Indicating HANK, then LARRY.)

I thought you were mad at him – now he's bitchin' you. What gives?

LARRY. Never mind.

(COWBOY comes over to the table. EMORY gives him a plate of food. BERNARD gives him salad and a glass of wine. HANK moves to the couch, sits, and puts his plate and glass on the coffee table. HAROLD moves to sit on the stairs and eat.)

COWBOY. What is it?

LARRY. Lasagna.

COWBOY. It looks like spaghetti and meatballs sorta flattened out.

DONALD. It's been in the steam room.

COWBOY. It has?

MICHAEL. *(Contemptuously.)* It looks like spaghetti and meatballs sorta flattened out. Ah yes, Harold – truly enviable.

HAROLD. As opposed to you, who knows so much about *haute cuisine*.

(A beat.)

HAROLD. Raconteur, gourmet, troll.

(LARRY takes a plate of food, goes to sit on the back of the couch from behind it.)

COWBOY. It's good.

HAROLD. *(Quick.)* You like it, eat it.

MICHAEL. Stuff your mouth so that you can't say anything.

(DONALD takes a plate.)

HAROLD. Turning.

BERNARD. *(To DONALD.)* Wine?

DONALD. No, thanks.

MICHAEL. Aw, go on, kiddo, force yourself. Have a little *vin ordinaire* to wash down all that depressed pasta.

HAROLD. Sommelier, connoisseur, pig.

(DONALD takes the glass of wine, moves up by the bar, puts the glass of wine on it, leans against the wall, eats his food. EMORY hands BERNARD a plate.)

BERNARD. *(To EMORY.)* Aren't you going to have any?

EMORY. No. My lip hurts too much to eat. Anybody going to take a plate up to Alan?

MICHAEL. The punching bag has now dissolved into Flo Nightingale.

LARRY. Hank?

HANK. I don't think he'd have any appetite.

(ALAN, as if he's heard his name, gets up from the bed, moves slowly to the top of the stairwell.)

EMORY. Do you like it, Hallie?

HAROLD. I'm having seconds and thirds and maybe even fifths.

(He gets up off the stairs, comes toward the table.)

I'm absolutely desperate to keep the weight up.

(**BERNARD** bends to whisper something in **EMORY's** ear. **EMORY** nods affirmatively, and **BERNARD** crosses to **COWBOY** and whispers in his ear. A beat. **COWBOY** returns his plate to the buffet and follows **EMORY** and **BERNARD** into the kitchen.)

MICHAEL. (*Parodying HAROLD.*) You're *absolutely* paranoid about *absolutely* everything.

HAROLD. Oh, yeah, well, why don't you *not* tell me about it.

MICHAEL. You starve yourself all day, living on coffee and cottage cheese so that you can gorge yourself at one meal. Then you feel guilt and moan and groan about how fat you are and how ugly you are when the truth is you're no fatter or thinner than you ever are.

EMORY. Polly Paranoia.

(**EMORY** moves to the coffee table to take **HANK's** empty plate.)

HANK. Just great, Emory.

EMORY. Connie Casserole, no-trouble-at-all-oh-Mary, Don't-Ask.

MICHAEL. (*To HAROLD.*) ...And this pathological lateness. It's downright *crazy*.

HAROLD. Turning.

MICHAEL. Standing before a bathroom mirror for hours and hours before you can walk out on the street. And looking no different after Christ knows how many applications of Christ knows how many ointments and salves and creams and masks.

HAROLD. I've got bad skin, what can I tell you.

MICHAEL. Who wouldn't after they deliberately take a pair of tweezers and *deliberately* mutilate their pores – no wonder you've got holes in your face after the hack job you've done on yourself year in and year out!

HAROLD. (*Coolly but defiantly.*) King of the Pig People.

MICHAEL. Yes, you've got scars on your face – but they're not that bad, and if you'd leave yourself alone, you wouldn't have any more than you've already awarded yourself.

HAROLD. You'd really like me to compliment you now for being so honest, wouldn't you? For being my best friend who will tell me what even my best friends won't tell me. You hateful sow.

MICHAEL. And the pills!

(Announcement to group.)

Harold has been gathering, saving, and storing up barbiturates for the last year like a goddamn squirrel. Hundreds of Nembutals, hundreds of Seconals. All in preparation for and anticipation of the long winter of his death.

(Silence.)

But I tell you right now, Hallie. When the times comes, you'll never have the guts. It's not always like it happens in plays, not all faggots bump themselves off at the end of the story.

HAROLD. What you say may be true. Time will undoubtedly tell. But, in the meantime, you've left out one detail – the cosmetics and astringents are *paid* for, the bathroom is *paid* for, the tweezers are *paid* for, and the pills *are paid for!*

(EMORY darts in and over to the light switch, plunges the room into darkness, except for the light from the tapers on the buffet table, and begins to sing "Happy Birthday." Immediately, BERNARD pushes the swinging door open and COWBOY enters, carrying a cake ablaze with candles. Everyone has now joined in with, "Happy birthday, dear Harold, happy birthday to you." This is followed by a round of applause. MICHAEL turns, goes to the bar, and makes another drink.)

EMORY. Blow out your candles, Mary, and make a wish!

MICHAEL. *(To himself.)* Blow out your candles, *Laura.*

EMORY. Awwww, she's thirty-two years young!

HAROLD. *(Groans, holds his head.)* Ohh, my God!

(BERNARD has brought in cake plates and forks. The room remains lit only by candlelight from the buffet table. COWBOY returns the cake to the table, and BERNARD begins to cut it and put the pieces on the plates.)

HANK. Now you have to open your gifts.

(He hands HAROLD a gift. HAROLD begins to rip the paper off.)

HAROLD. Where's the card?

EMORY. Here.

HAROLD. Oh. From Larry.

(Finishes tearing off the paper.)

It's heaven! Oh, I just love it, Larry.

(HAROLD holds up a graphic design.)

COWBOY. What is it?

HAROLD. It's the deed to Boardwalk.

EMORY. Oh, gay pop art!

DONALD. *(To LARRY.)* It's sensational. Did you do it?

LARRY. Yes.

HAROLD. Oh, it's super, Larry. It goes up the minute I get home.

(HAROLD gives LARRY a peck on the cheek.)

COWBOY. *(To HAROLD.)* I don't get it – you cruise Atlantic City or something?

MICHAEL. *(To EMORY.)* How much did you pay for him?

(HAROLD has torn open another gift, takes the card from inside.)

EMORY. He was a steal.

COWBOY. I'm not a steal. I cost twenty dollars.

MICHAEL. And what do you do for twenty dollars?

COWBOY. I do my best.

HAROLD. Oh, what a nifty sweater! Thank you, Hank.

HANK. You can take it back and pick out another one if you want to.

HAROLD. I think this one is just nifty.

(DONALD goes to the bar, makes himself a brandy and soda.)

BERNARD. Who wants cake?

EMORY. Everybody?

DONALD. None for me.

(HANK comes over to the table. BERNARD gives him a plate of cake, passes another one to COWBOY, and a third to LARRY. HAROLD has torn the paper off another gift. Suddenly laughs aloud.)

HAROLD. Oh, Bernard! How divine! Look, everybody! Bejeweled knee pads!

(Holds up a pair of basketball knee pads with sequin initials.)

BERNARD. Monogrammed!

EMORY. Bernard, you're a camp!

(HAROLD has unwrapped his last gift. He is silent. Pause.)

HAROLD. Thank you, Michael.

MICHAEL. What?

(Turns to see gift.)

Oh.

(A beat.)

You're welcome.

(MICHAEL finishes off his drink, returns to the bar.)

LARRY. What is it, Harold?

(A beat.)

HAROLD. It's a photograph of him in a silver frame. And there's an inscription engraved and the date.

BERNARD. What's it say?

HAROLD. Just...something personal.

(MICHAEL spins round from the bar.)

MICHAEL. Hey, Bernard, what do you say we have a little music to liven things up!

BERNARD. Okay.

EMORY. Yeah, I feel like dancing.

MICHAEL. How about something good and ethnic, Emory – one of your specialties, like a military toe tap with sparklers.

EMORY. I don't do that at birthdays – only on the Fourth of July.

(BERNARD puts on a romantic record. EMORY goes to him. They start to dance slowly.)*

LARRY. Come on, Michael.

MICHAEL. I only lead.

LARRY. I can follow.

MICHAEL. No, thanks. I'll just sip this one out.

HAROLD. Come on, Tex, you're on.

(COWBOY gets to his feet but is a washout as a dancing partner. HAROLD gives up, takes out another cigarette, strikes a match. As he does, he catches sight of someone over by the stairs, walks over to ALAN, and blows out the match.)

Wanna dance?

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EMORY. (*Sees ALAN.*) Uh-oh. Yvonne the Terrible is back.

MICHAEL. Oh, hello, Alan. Feel better? This is where you came in, isn't it?

(ALAN starts to cross directly to the door. MICHAEL breaks away. ALAN reaches the door and starts to open it as MICHAEL intercepts, slams the door with one hand, and leans against it, crossing his legs.)

As they say in the Deep South, don't rush off in the heat of the day.

HAROLD. Revolution complete.

(MICHAEL slowly takes ALAN by the arm, walks him slowly back into the room.)

MICHAEL. ...You missed the cake – and you missed the opening of the gifts – but you're still in luck. You're just in time for a party game.

(They have reached the phonograph. MICHAEL rejects the record. The music stops, the dancing stops. MICHAEL releases ALAN, claps his hands.)

...Hey, everybody! Game time!

(ALAN starts to move. MICHAEL catches him gently by the sleeve.)

HAROLD. Why don't you just let him go, Michael?

MICHAEL. He can go if he wants to – but not before we play a little game.

EMORY. What's it going to be – movie-star gin?

MICHAEL. That's too faggy for Alan to play – he wouldn't be any good at it.

HAROLD. What would you like to play, Michael – the Truth Game?

MICHAEL. (*Chuckles to himself.*) Cute, Hallie.

HAROLD. Or do you want to play Murder? You all remember that one, don't you?

MICHAEL. (*To HAROLD.*) Very, very cute.

DONALD. As I recall, they're quite similar. The rules are the same in both – you kill somebody.

MICHAEL. In affairs of the heart, there are no rules. Isn't that right, Harold?

HAROLD. That's what I always say.

MICHAEL. Well, that's the name of the game. The Affairs of the Heart.

COWBOY. I've never heard of that one.

MICHAEL. Of course you've never heard of it – I just made it up, baby doll. Affairs of the Heart is a combination of both the Truth Game and Murder – with a new twist.

HAROLD. I can hardly wait to find out what that is.

ALAN. Mickey, I'm leaving.

(He starts to move.)

MICHAEL. (*Firmly, flatly.*) Stay where you are.

HAROLD. Michael, let him go.

MICHAEL. He really doesn't *want* to. If he did, he'd have left a long time ago – or he wouldn't have come here in the first place.

ALAN. (*Holding his forehead.*) ...Mickey, I don't *feel* well!

MICHAEL. (*Low tone, but distinctly articulate.*) My name is Michael. I am called Michael. You must never call anyone called Michael Mickey. Those of us who are named Michael get very nervous about it. If you don't believe it – try it.

ALAN. I'm sorry. I can't think.

MICHAEL. You can think. What you can't do – is leave. It's like watching an accident on the highway – you can't look at it and you can't look away.

(He takes ALAN by the arm, leads him to a chair. Slowly, deliberately, pushes him down into it.)

Now! Who's going to play with Alan and me? Everyone?

HAROLD. I have no intention of playing.

DONALD. Nor do I.

MICHAEL. Well, not everyone is a participant in *life*. There are always those who stand on the sidelines and watch.

LARRY. What's the game?

MICHAEL. Simply this: We all have to call on the telephone the *one person* we truly believe we have loved.

HANK. I'm not playing.

LARRY. Oh, yes, you are.

HANK. You'd like for me to play, wouldn't you?

LARRY. You bet I would. I'd like to know who you'd call after all the fancy speeches I've heard lately. Who would you call? Would you call me?

MICHAEL. (*To BERNARD.*) Sounds like there's, how you say, trouble in paradise.

HAROLD. If there isn't, I think you'll be able to stir up some.

HANK. (*To LARRY.*) And who would *you* call? Don't think I think for one minute it would be me. Or that one call would do it. You'd have to make several, wouldn't you? About three long-distance and God only knows how many locals.

COWBOY. I'm glad I don't have to pay the bill.

MICHAEL. Quiet!

HAROLD. (*Loud whisper to COWBOY.*) Oh, don't worry, Michael won't pay it either.

MICHAEL. Now, here's how it works.

(No response from anyone. A beat.)

If you make the call, you get one point. If the person you are calling answers, you get two more points. If somebody else answers, you get only one. If there's no answer at all, you're screwed.

DONALD. You're screwed if you make the call.

HAROLD. You're a *fool* – if you screw yourself.

MICHAEL. When you get the person whom you are calling on the line – if you tell them who are you, you get two points. And then – if you tell them that you *love* them – you get a bonus of five more points!

HAROLD. Hateful.

MICHAEL. Therefore you can get as many as ten points and as few as one.

HAROLD. You can get as few as none – if you know how to work it.

MICHAEL. The one with the highest score wins.

ALAN. Hank. Let's get out of here.

EMORY. Well, now. Did you hear that!

MICHAEL. Just the two of you together. The pals...the guys... the buddy-buddies...the he-men.

EMORY. I think Larry might have something to say about that.

BERNARD. Emory.

MICHAEL. The duenna speaks.

(He crosses to take the telephone from the desk, brings it to the group.)

So who's playing?

(A beat.)

Emory? Bernard?

BERNARD. I don't think I want to play.

MICHAEL. Why, Bernard! Where's your fun-loving spirit?

BERNARD. I don't think this game is fun.

HAROLD. It's absolutely hateful.

ALAN. Hank, leave with me.

HANK. You don't understand, Alan. I can't. You can...but I can't.

ALAN. Why, Hank? Why can't you?

LARRY. *(To HANK.)* If he doesn't understand, why don't you explain it to him?

MICHAEL. *I'll* explain it.

HAROLD. I had a feeling you might.

MICHAEL. Alan... Larry and Hank are lovers. Not just roommates, *bedmates. Lovers.*

ALAN. Michael!

MICHAEL. No man's still got a *roommate* when he's over forty years old. If they're not lovers, they're sisters.

LARRY. Hank is the one who's over forty.

MICHAEL. Well, you're pushing it!

ALAN. ...Hank?

(A beat.)

HANK. Yes, Alan. Larry is my lover.

ALAN. But...but...you're married.

(MICHAEL, LARRY, EMORY, and COWBOY are sent into instant gales of laughter.)

HAROLD. I think you said the wrong thing.

MICHAEL. Don't you love that quaint little idea – if a man is married, then he is automatically heterosexual.

(A beat.)

Alan – Hank swings both ways – with a definite preference.

(A beat.)

Now. Who makes the first call? Emory?

EMORY. You go, Bernard.

BERNARD. I don't want to.

EMORY. I don't want to either. I don't want to at all.

DONALD. *(To himself.)* There are no accidents.

MICHAEL. Then, may I say, on your way home I hope you *will* yourself over an embankment.

EMORY. *(To BERNARD.)* Go on. Call up Peter Dahlbeck. That's who you'd like to call, isn't it?

MICHAEL. Who is Peter Dahlbeck?

EMORY. The boy in Detroit whose family Bernard's mother has been a laundress for since he was a little black-eyed pea.

BERNARD. I worked for them – after school and every summer. I think I've loved him all my life. But he never knew I was alive. Besides, he's straight.

COWBOY. So nothing ever happened between you?

EMORY. Oh, they finally made it – in the pool house one night after a drunken swimming party.

LARRY. With the right wine and the right music, they're damn few that aren't curious.

BERNARD. ...And afterwards we went swimming in the nude in the dark with only the moon reflecting on the water.

MICHAEL. How romantic. And then the next morning you took him his coffee and Alka-Seltzer on a tray.

BERNARD. It was in the afternoon. I remember I was worried sick all morning about having to face him. But he pretended like nothing at all had happened.

MICHAEL. Christ, he must have been so drunk he didn't remember a thing.

BERNARD. Yeah. I was sure relieved.

MICHAEL. Odd how that works. And now, for ten points, get that liar on the phone.

(A beat. BERNARD picks up the phone, dials.)

LARRY. You *know* the number?

BERNARD. Sure. He's back in Grosse Pointe, living at home. He just got separated from his third wife.

(All watch BERNARD as he puts the receiver to his ear, waits. A beat. He hangs up quickly.)

EMORY. D.A. or B.Y.?

COWBOY. What?

EMORY. That's operator lingo. It means "doesn't answer" or "busy."

MICHAEL. He didn't even give it time to find out.

(Coaxing.)

Go ahead, Bernard. Pick up the phone and dial. You'll think of something. You know you want to call him. You know that, don't you? Well, go ahead. Your curiosity has got the best of you now. So...go on, call him.

(A beat. BERNARD picks up the receiver, dials again. He lets it ring this time.)

HAROLD. Hateful.

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.)* Shhhhhiii...

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-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.)

EMORY. Bernard, forgive me. I'm sorry. I won't ever say those things to you again.

(MICHAEL watches, triumphant. BERNARD pours another glass of wine. A beat.)

B.Y.

MICHAEL. It's busy?

EMORY. *(Nods.)* Loraine is probably talking to her mother. Oh, yes. Delbert married Loraine.

MICHAEL. I'm sorry, you'll have to forfeit your turn. We can't wait.

(He takes the phone and hands it to LARRY, who starts to dial.)

HAROLD. *(To LARRY.)* Well, you're not wasting any time.

HANK. Who are you calling?

LARRY. Charlie.

(EMORY gets up, jerks the phone out of LARRY's hands.)

EMORY. I refuse to forfeit my turn! It's *my turn*, and I'm taking it!

MICHAEL. That's the spirit, Emory! *Hit that iceberg – don't miss it! Hit it! Goddamn it!* I want a smash of a finale!

EMORY. Oh, God, I'm drunk.

MICHAEL. A falling-down-drunk-nellie-queen.

HAROLD. Well, that's the pot calling the kettle beige!

MICHAEL. *(Snapping. To HAROLD.)* I am not drunk! You cannot tell that I am drunk! Donald! I'm not drunk! Am I!

DONALD. I'm drunk.

EMORY. So am I. I am a *major drunk*.

MICHAEL. *(To EMORY.)* Shut up and dial!

EMORY. *(Dialing.)* I am a major drunk of this or any other season.

(Slight pause.)

...It's ringing. It is no longer B.Y. Hello?

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

EMORY. ...Who's speaking? Who? ...Doctor Delbert Botts?

MICHAEL. Two points.

EMORY. Oh, Del, is this really you? Oh, nobody. You don't know me. You wouldn't remember me. I'm...just a friend. A falling-down drunken friend. Hello? Hello? Hello?

(Lowers the receiver.)

He hung up.

(He hangs up the telephone.)

MICHAEL. Three points total. You're winning.

EMORY. He said I must have the wrong party.

(BERNARD gets up, goes into the kitchen.)

HAROLD. He's right. We have the wrong party. We should be somewhere else.

EMORY. It's your party, Hallie. Aren't you having a good time?

HAROLD. Simply fabulous. And what about you? Are you having a good time, Emory? Are you having as good a time as you thought you would?

(LARRY takes the phone.)

HANK. My turn now.

LARRY. It's my turn to call Charlie.

HANK. No. Let me.

LARRY. Are *you* going to call Charlie?

MICHAEL. The score is three to two. Emory's favor.

ALAN. Don't, Hank. Don't you see – Bernard was right.

HANK. *(Firmly, to ALAN.)* I want to.

(A beat. He holds out his hand for the phone.)

Larry?

(A beat.)

LARRY. *(He gives him the phone.)* Be my eager guest.

COWBOY. *(To LARRY.)* Is he going to call Charlie for you?

(LARRY breaks into laughter. HANK starts to dial.)

LARRY. Charlie is all the people I cheat on Hank with.

DONALD. With whom I cheat on Hank.

MICHAEL. The butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker.

LARRY. Right! I love 'em all. And what he refuses to understand – is that I've got to *have* 'em all. I am *not* the marrying kind, and I never will be.

HAROLD. Gypsy feet.

LARRY. Who are you calling?

MICHAEL. Jealous?

LARRY. Curious as hell!

MICHAEL. And a little jealous, too.

LARRY. Who are you calling?

MICHAEL. Did it ever occur to you that Hank might be doing the same thing behind your back that you do behind his?

LARRY. I wish to Christ he would. It'd make life a hell of a lot easier. Who are you calling?

HAROLD. Whoever it is, they're not sitting on top of the telephone.

HANK. Hello?

COWBOY. They must have been in the tub.

MICHAEL. *(Snaps at COWBOY.)* Eighty-six!

*(COWBOY goes over to a far corner, sits down.
BERNARD enters, uncorking another bottle of wine. Taking note.)*

One point.

HANK. ...I'd like to leave a message.

MICHAEL. Not in. One point.

HANK. Would you say that Hank called? Yes, it is. Oh, good evening. How are you?

LARRY. Who the hell *is* that?

HANK. Yes, that's right – the message is for my roommate, Larry. Just say that I called and...

LARRY. It's our answering service!

HANK. ...And said...I love you.

MICHAEL. *Five points!* You said it! You get five goddamn points for saying it!

ALAN. Hank! Hank! ...Are you crazy?

HANK. ...No. You didn't hear me incorrectly. That's what I said. The message is for Larry, and it's from me, Hank, and it is just as I said: *I...love...you.* Thanks.

(He hangs up.)

MICHAEL. Seven points total! Hank, you're ahead, baby. You're way, way ahead of everybody!

ALAN. Why? ...Oh, Hank, why? Why did you do that?

HANK. Because I do love him. And I don't care who knows it.

ALAN. Don't say that.

HANK. Why not? It's the truth.

ALAN. I can't believe you.

HANK. *(Directly to ALAN.)* I left my wife and family for Larry.

ALAN. I'm really not interested in hearing about it.

MICHAEL. Sure you are. Go ahead, Hankola, tell him all about it.

ALAN. No! I don't want to hear it. It's disgusting!

(A beat.)

HANK. Some men do it for another woman.

ALAN. Well, I could understand *that*. That's *normal*.

HANK. It just doesn't always work out that way, Alan. No matter how you might want it to. And God knows, nobody ever wanted it more than I did. I really and truly felt that I was in love with my wife when I married her. It wasn't altogether my trying to prove something

to myself. I did love her, and she loved me. But...there was always that something there...

ALAN. Always?

HANK. I don't know. I suppose so.

EMORY. I've known what I was since I was four years old.

MICHAEL. Everybody's always known it about *you*, Emory.

DONALD. I've always known it about myself, too.

HANK. I don't know when it was that I started admitting it to myself. For so long I either labeled it something else or denied it completely.

MICHAEL. Christ-was-I-drunk-last-night.

HANK. And then there came a time when I just couldn't lie to myself anymore... I thought about it but I never did anything about it. I think the first time was during my wife's last pregnancy. We lived near New Haven – in the country. She and the kids still live there. Well, anyway, there was a teachers' meeting here in New York. She didn't feel up to the trip and I came alone. And that day on the train I began to think about it and think about it and think about it. I thought of nothing else the whole trip. And within fifteen minutes after I had arrived, I had picked up a guy in the men's room of Grand Central Station.

ALAN. (*Quietly.*) Jesus.

HANK. I'd never done anything like that in my life before, and I was scared to death. But he turned out to be a nice fellow. I've never seen him again, and it's funny, I can't even remember his name anymore.

(*A beat.*)

Anyway. After that, it got easier.

HAROLD. Practice makes perfect.

HANK. And then...sometime later...Larry and I met at a party my wife and I had gone in town for.

EMORY. And your real troubles began.

HANK. That was two years ago.

LARRY. Why am I always the goddamn villain in the piece!
If I'm not thought of as a happy-home wrecker, I'm an
impossible son of a bitch to live with!

HAROLD. Guilt turns to hostility. Isn't that right, Michael?

MICHAEL. Go stick your tweezers in your cheek.

LARRY. I'm fed up to the teeth with everybody feeling so
goddamn sorry for poor shat-upon Hank.

EMORY. Aw, Larry, everybody knows you're Frieda Fickle.

LARRY. I've never made any promises and I never intend
to. It's my right to lead my sex life without answering to
anybody – Hank included! And if those terms are not
acceptable, then we must not live together. Numerous
relations is a part of the way I am!

EMORY. You don't have to be gay to be a wanton.

LARRY. By the way I am, I don't mean being gay – I mean
my sexual appetite. And I don't think of myself as a
wanton. Emory, you are the most promiscuous person
I know.

EMORY. I am not promiscuous at all!

MICHAEL. Not by choice. By design. Why would anybody
want to go to bed with a flaming little sissy like you?

BERNARD. Michael!

MICHAEL. (*To EMORY.*) Who'd make a pass at you – I'll tell
you who – nobody. Except maybe some fugitive from
the Braille Institute.

BERNARD. (*To EMORY.*) Why do you let him talk to you that
way?

HAROLD. Physical beauty is not everything.

MICHAEL. Thank you, Quasimodo.

LARRY. What do you think it's like living with the goddamn
gestapo! I can't breathe without getting the third
degree!

MICHAEL. Larry, it's your turn to call.

LARRY. I can't take all that let's-be-faithful-and-never-look-
at-another-person routine. It just doesn't work. If you

want to promise that, fine. Then do it and stick to it.
But if you *have* to promise it – as far as I'm concerned
– nothing finishes a relationship faster.

HAROLD. Give me Librium or give me Meth.

BERNARD. (*Intoxicated now.*) Yeah, freedom, baby! Freedom!

LARRY. You gotta have it! It can't work any other way. And
the ones who swear their undying fidelity are lying.
Most of them, anyway – ninety percent of them. They
cheat on each other constantly and lie through their
teeth. I'm sorry, I can't be like that, and it drives Hank
up the wall.

HANK. There is that ten percent.

LARRY. The only way it stands a chance is with some sort of
an understanding.

HANK. I've tried to go along with that.

LARRY. Aw, *come on!*

HANK. I agreed to an agreement.

LARRY. Your agreement.

MICHAEL. What agreement?

LARRY. A ménage.

HAROLD. The lovers' agreement.

LARRY. Look, I know a lot of people think it's the answer.
They don't consider it cheating. But it's not my style.

HANK. Well, *I* certainly didn't want it.

LARRY. Then who suggested it?

HANK. It was a compromise.

LARRY. Exactly.

HANK. And you agreed.

LARRY. I didn't agree to anything. You agreed to your own
proposal and *informed me* that I agreed.

COWBOY. I don't understand. What's a me...mena-a...

MICHAEL. A ménage à trois, baby. Two's company – three's
a ménage.

COWBOY. Oh.

HANK. It works for some.

LARRY. Well, I'm not one for group therapy. I'm sorry, I can't relate to anyone or anything that way. I'm old-fashioned – I like 'em all, but I like 'em one at a time!

MICHAEL. (*To LARRY.*) Did you like Donald as a single side attraction?

(*Pause.*)

LARRY. Yes. I did.

DONALD. So did I, Larry.

LARRY. (*To DONALD, referring to MICHAEL.*) Did you tell him?

DONALD. No.

MICHAEL. It was perfectly obvious from the moment you walked in. What was the song and dance about having seen each other but never having met?

DONALD. It was true. We saw each other in the baths and went to bed together, but we never spoke a word and never knew each other's name.

EMORY. You have better luck than I do. If I don't get arrested, my trick announces upon departure that he's been exposed to hepatitis! One more shot of gamma globulin and my ass'll look like a pair of colanders!

MICHAEL. In spring, a young man's fancy turns to a fancy, young man.

LARRY. (*To HANK.*) Oh, Hank. Don't look at me like that. You've been playing footsie with the penguin all night. I supposed you'd like the three of us to have a go at it.

HANK. At least it'd be together.

LARRY. That point eludes me.

HANK. What kind of an understanding do you *want*!

LARRY. Respect – for each other's freedom. With no need to lie or pretend. In my own way, Hank, I love you, but you have to understand that even though I do want to go on living with you, sometimes there may be others. I don't want to flaunt it in your face. If it happens, I know I'll never mention it. But if you ask me, I'll tell you. I don't want to hurt you, but I won't lie to you if you want to know anything about me.

BERNARD. He gets points.

MICHAEL. What?

BERNARD. He said it. He said "I love you" to Hank. He gets the bonus.

MICHAEL. He didn't call him.

DONALD. He called him. He just didn't use the telephone.

MICHAEL. Then he doesn't get any points.

BERNARD. He gets five points!

MICHAEL. He didn't use the telephone. He doesn't get a goddamn thing!

(LARRY goes to the phone, picks up the receiver, looks at the number of the second line, and dials. A beat. The phone rings.)

LARRY. It's for you, Hank. Why don't you take it upstairs?

(The phone continues to ring. HANK gets up, goes up the stairs to the bedroom. Pause. He presses the second-line button, picks up the receiver. Everyone downstairs is silent.)

HANK. Hello?

BERNARD. One point.

LARRY. Hello, Hank.

BERNARD. Two points.

LARRY. ...This is Larry.

BERNARD. Two more points!

LARRY. ...For what it's worth, I love you.

BERNARD. Five points bonus!

HANK. I'll... I'll try.

LARRY. I will, too.

(He hangs up. HANK hangs up.)

BERNARD. That's ten points total!

EMORY. Larry's the winner!

HAROLD. Well, that wasn't as much fun as I thought it would be.

MICHAEL. THE GAME ISN'T OVER YET!

(HANK moves toward the bed into darkness.)

Your turn, Alan.

(MICHAEL gets the phone, slams it down in front of ALAN.)

PICK UP THE PHONE, BUSTER!

EMORY. Michael, don't!

MICHAEL. STAY OUT OF THIS!

EMORY. You don't have to, Alan. You don't have to.

ALAN. Emory...I'm sorry for what I did before.

(A beat.)

EMORY. ...Oh, forget it.

MICHAEL. Forgive us our trespasses. Christ, now you're both joined at the goddamn hip! You can decorate his home, Emory – and he can get you out of jail the next time you're arrested on a morals charge.

(A beat.)

Who are you going to call, Alan?

(No response.)

Can't remember anyone? Well, maybe you need a minute to think. Is that it?

(No response.)

HAROLD. I believe this will be the final round.

COWBOY. Michael, aren't you going to call anyone?

HAROLD. How could he? He's never loved anyone.

MICHAEL. *(Sings the classic vaudeville walk-off to HAROLD.)*

NO MATTER HOW YOU FIGGER,

(Indicates BERNARD.)

IT'S TOUGH TO BE A NIGGER,

BUT IT'S TOUGHER

TO BE A JEEEW-OOOUU-OO!

DONALD. My God, Michael, you're a charming host.

HAROLD. Michael doesn't have charm, Donald. Michael has counter-charm.

(LARRY crosses to stairs.)

MICHAEL. Going somewhere?

(LARRY stops and turns to MICHAEL.)

LARRY. Yes. Excuse me.

(He turns and goes up the stairs.)

MICHAEL. You're going to miss the end of the game.

LARRY. With any luck, I won't be back until it's all over.

(He turns and continues up the stairs.)

MICHAEL. *(Into ALAN's ear.)* What do you suppose is going on up there? Hmmm, Alan? What do you imagine Larry and Hank are doing? Hmmmmmm?

EMORY. Whatever they're doing, they're not hurting anyone.

HAROLD. And they're minding their own business.

MICHAEL. And you mind yours, Harold. I'm warning you!

(A beat.)

HAROLD. *(Coolly.)* Are you now? Are you warning *me?* *Me?* I'm Harold. I'm the one person you don't warn, Michael. Because you and I are a match. And we tread very softly with each other because we both play each other's game too well. Oh, I know this game you're playing. I know it very well. And I play it very well. You play it very well, too. But you know what, I'm the only one that's better at it than you are. I can beat you at it. So don't push me. I'm warning *you.*

(A beat. MICHAEL starts to laugh.)

MICHAEL. You're funny, Hallie. A laff riot. Isn't he funny, Alan? Or, as you might say, isn't he amusing? He's an amusing faggot, isn't he? Or, as you might say, freak. That's what you called Emory, wasn't it? A freak? A pansy? My, what an antiquated vocabulary you have. I'm surprised you didn't say sodomite or pederast.

(A beat.)

You'd better let me bring you up to date. Now it's not so new, but it might be new to you –

(A beat.)

Have you heard the term “closet queen”? Do you know what that means? Do you know what it means to be “in the closet”?

EMORY. Don't, Michael. It won't help anything to explain what it means.

MICHAEL. He already knows. He knows very, very well what a closet queen is. Don't you, Alan?

(Pause.)

ALAN. Michael, if you are insinuating that I am homosexual, I can only say that you are mistaken.

MICHAEL. Am I?

(A beat.)

What about Justin Stuart?

ALAN. ...What about...Justin Stuart?

MICHAEL. You were in love with him, that's what about him.

(A beat.)

And *that* is who you are going to call.

ALAN. Justin and I were very good friends. That is all. Unfortunately, we had a parting of ways and that was the end of the friendship. We have not spoken for years. I most certainly will not call him now.

MICHAEL. According to Justin, the friendship was quite passionate.

ALAN. What do you mean?

MICHAEL. I mean that you slept with him in college. Several times.

ALAN. That is not true!

MICHAEL. Several times. One time, it's youth. Twice, a phase, maybe. Several times, *you like it!*

ALAN. IT'S NOT TRUE!

MICHAEL. Yes, it is. Because Justin Stuart *is* homosexual. He comes to New York on occasion. He calls me. I've

taken him to parties. Larry “had” him once. *I* have slept with Justin Stuart. And he has told me all about *you*.

ALAN. Then he told you a lie.

(*A beat.*)

MICHAEL. You were obsessed with Justin. That’s all you talked about, morning, noon, and night. You started doing it about Hank upstairs tonight. What an attractive fellow he is and all that transparent crap.

ALAN. He *is* an attractive fellow. What’s wrong with saying so?

MICHAEL. Would you like to join him and Larry right now?

ALAN. I said he was attractive. That’s all.

MICHAEL. How many times do you have to say it? How many times did you have to say it about Justin: what a good tennis player he was; what a good dancer he was; what a good body he had; what good taste he had; how bright he was – how *amusing* he was – how the girls were all mad for him – what close friends you were.

ALAN. We...we...were...very close...very good...friends.
That’s all.

MICHAEL. It was *obvious* – and when you did it around Fran, it was downright embarrassing. Even she must have had her doubts about you.

ALAN. *Justin...lied.* If he told you that, he lied. It is a lie. A vicious lie. He’d say anything about me now to get even. He could never get over that fact that *I* dropped *him*. But I had to. I had to because...he told me...he told me about himself...he told me that he wanted to be my lover. And I... I...told him...he made me sick... I told him I pitied him.

(*A beat.*)

MICHAEL. You ended the friendship, Alan, because you couldn’t face the truth about yourself. You could go along, sleeping with Justin, as long as he lied to himself and you lied to yourself and you both dated girls and labeled yourselves men and called yourselves just fond

friends. But Justin finally had to be honest about the truth, and you couldn't take it. You couldn't take it and so you destroyed the friendship and your friend along with it.

(MICHAEL goes to the desk and gets address book.)

ALAN. No!

MICHAEL. Justin could never understand what he'd done wrong to make you cut him off. He blamed himself.

ALAN. No!

MICHAEL. He did until he eventually found out who he was and what he was.

ALAN. No!

MICHAEL. But to this day he still remembers the treatment – the scars he got from you.

(Puts address book in front of ALAN on coffee table.)

ALAN. NO!

MICHAEL. Pick up this phone and call Justin. Call him and apologize and tell him what you should have told him many years ago.

(Picks up the phone and shoves it at ALAN.)

ALAN. NO! HE LIED! NOT A WORD IS TRUE!

MICHAEL. CALL HIM!

(ALAN won't take the phone.)

All right then, I'll dial!

HAROLD. You're so helpful.

(MICHAEL starts to dial.)

ALAN. Give it to me.

(MICHAEL hands ALAN the receiver. ALAN takes it, hangs up for a moment, lifts it again, and starts to dial. Everyone watches silently. ALAN finishes dialing, lifts the receiver to his ear.)

ALAN. ...Hello?

MICHAEL. One point.

ALAN. ...It's...it's Alan.

MICHAEL. Two points.

ALAN. ...Yes, yes, it's *me*.

MICHAEL. Is it Justin?

ALAN. ...You sound surprised.

MICHAEL. I should hope to think so - after all this time!
Two more points.

ALAN. I... I'm in New York. Yes. I... I won't explain now...I...
I just called to tell you...

MICHAEL. THAT I LOVE YOU, GODDAMMIT! I LOVE
YOU!

ALAN. I love you.

MICHAEL. You get the goddamn bonus. TEN POINTS
TOTAL! JACKPOT!

ALAN. I love you and I beg you to forgive me.

MICHAEL. Give me that!

(He snatches the phone from ALAN.)

Justin! Did you hear what that son of a bitch said!

(A beat. MICHAEL is speechless for a moment.)

...Fran?

(A beat.)

Well, of course I expected it to be you!...

(A beat.)

How are you? Me too. Yes, yes...he told me everything.
Oh, don't thank *me*. Please... Please...

(A beat.)

I'll... I'll put him back on.

(A beat.)

My love to the kids...

ALAN. ...Darling? I'll take the first plane I can get. Yes. I'm
sorry, too. I love you very much.

(He hangs up, stands, crosses to the door, and stops. He turns around, surveys the group.)

Thank you, Michael.

(He opens the door and exits. Silence. MICHAEL slowly sinks down on the couch, covering his face. Pause.)

COWBOY. Who won?

DONALD. It was a tie.

(HAROLD crosses to MICHAEL.)

HAROLD. *(Calmly, coldly, clinically.)* Now it is my turn. And ready or not, Michael, here goes.

(A beat.)

You are a sad and pathetic man. You're a homosexual, and you don't want to be. But there is nothing you can do to change it. Not all your prayers to your God, not all the analysis you can buy in all the years you've got left to live. You may very well one day be able to know a heterosexual life if you want it desperately enough – if you pursue it with the fervor with which you annihilate – but you will always be homosexual as well. Always, Michael. Always. Until the day you die.

(He turns, gathers his gifts, and goes to EMORY, who stands up unsteadily.)

Oh, friends, thanks for the nifty party and the super gift.

(Looks toward COWBOY.)

It's just what I needed.

(EMORY smiles. HAROLD gives him a hug and spots BERNARD sitting on the floor with his head bowed.)

...Bernard, thank you.

(No response.)

(To EMORY.) Will you get him home?

EMORY. Don't worry about her. I'll take care of everything.

(HAROLD turns to DONALD, who is at the bar making himself another drink.)

HAROLD. Donald, good to see you.

DONALD. Good night, Harold. See you again sometime.

HAROLD. Yeah. How about a year from Shavuot?

(HAROLD goes to COWBOY.)

Come on, Tex. Let's go to my place.

(COWBOY gets up and goes to him.)

Are you good in bed?

COWBOY. Well... I try to show a little affection – it keeps me from feeling like such a whore.

(A beat. HAROLD turns. COWBOY opens the door for them. They start out. HAROLD pauses.)

HAROLD. Oh, Michael...thanks for the laughs. Call you tomorrow.

(No response. A beat. HAROLD and COWBOY exit.)

EMORY. Come on, Bernard. Time to go home.

(EMORY, frail as he is, manages to pull BERNARD's arm around his neck, gets him on his feet.)

Oh, Mary, you're a heavy mother.

BERNARD. *(Practically inaudible mumble.)* Why did I call? Why?

EMORY. Thank you, Michael. Good night, Donald.

DONALD. Goodbye, Emory.

BERNARD. Why...

EMORY. It's all right, Bernard. Everything's all right. I'm going to make you some coffee, and everything's going to be all right.

(EMORY virtually carries BERNARD out. DONALD closes the door. Silence. MICHAEL slowly slips from the couch onto the floor. A beat. Then, slowly, he begins a low moan that

increases in volume – almost like a siren. Suddenly, he slams his open hands to his ears.)

MICHAEL. *(In desperate panic.)* Donald! Donald! DONALD!
DONALD!

(DONALD puts down his drink and rushes to MICHAEL. MICHAEL is now white with fear and tears are bursting from his eyes. He begins to gasp his words.)

Oh, no! No! What have I done! Oh, my God, what have I done!

(MICHAEL writhes. DONALD holds him and cradles him in his arms.)

DONALD. Michael! Michael!

MICHAEL. *(Weeping.)* Oh, no! NO! It's beginning! The liquor is starting to wear off, and the anxiety is beginning! Oh, NO! No! I feel it! I know it's going to happen. Donald!! Donald! Don't leave me! Please! Please! Oh, my God, what have I done! Oh, Jesus! I can't handle it anymore. I won't make it!

DONALD. *(Physically subduing him.)* Michael! Michael! Stop it! Stop it! I'll give you a Valium – I've got some in my pocket!

MICHAEL. *(Hysterical.)* No! No! Pills and alcohol – I'll die!

DONALD. I'm not going to give you the whole bottle! Come on, let go of me! Here. Michael, stop that goddamn crying and take this pill!

(MICHAEL straightens up, puts the pill into his mouth amid choking sobs, takes the water, drinks, and returns the glass to DONALD.)

MICHAEL. I'm like Ol' Man River – tired of livin' and scared o' dyin'.

(DONALD puts the glass on the bar, comes back to the couch, and sits down. MICHAEL collapses into his arms, sobbing. Pause.)

DONALD. Shhhhh. Shhhhhh. Michael. Shhhhhh. Michael.
Michael.

*(DONALD rocks him back and forth. He quiets.
Pause.)*

MICHAEL. ...If we...if we could just...not hate ourselves so much. That's it, you know. If we could just *learn* not to hate ourselves quite so very much.

DONALD. Yes, I know. I know.

(MICHAEL straightens up, dries his eyes on his sleeve.)

MICHAEL. Who was it that used to always say, "You show me a happy homosexual, and I'll show you a gay corpse"?

DONALD. I don't know. Who was it who always used to say that?

(MICHAEL is sniffing. DONALD hands him a handkerchief. He takes it and blows his nose.)

MICHAEL. By the way, I think your analyst is a quack.

DONALD. Earlier, you said he was a prick.

MICHAEL. That's right. He's a prick quack. Or a quack prick, whichever you prefer.

(DONALD gets up from the couch and goes for his drink.)

DONALD. *(Heaving a sigh.)* Harold was right. You'll never change.

MICHAEL. Come back, Donald. I need you. Just like Mickey Mouse needs Minnie Mouse – just like Donald Duck needs Minnie Duck. Mickey needs Donnie.

DONALD. My name is Donald. I am called Donald. You must never call anyone named Donald Donnie...

(MICHAEL gets up from the couch, surveys the wreckage of the dishes and gift wrappings.)

MICHAEL. Do you suppose there's any possibility of just burning this room?

(A beat.)

What time is it?

DONALD. It's early.

(He goes to a closet door, takes out a blazer, and puts it on.)

Where're you going?

MICHAEL. The bedroom is ocupado, and I don't want to go to sleep anyway until I try to walk off the booze. If I went to sleep like this, when I wake up they'd have to put me in a padded cell – not that that's where I don't belong.

(A beat.)

And...and...there's a midnight mass at St. Malachy's that all the show people go to. I think I'll walk over there and catch it.

DONALD. *(Raises his glass.)* Well, pray for me.

MICHAEL. Will I see you next Saturday?

DONALD. Unless you have other plans.

MICHAEL. No.

(He turns to go.)

DONALD. Michael?

MICHAEL. *(He stops and turns back.)* What?

DONALD. Why do you think he stayed? Why do you think he took all of that from you?

MICHAEL. There are no accidents. He was begging to get killed. He was dying for someone to let him have it, and he got what he wanted.

DONALD. He could have been telling the truth. Justin could've lied. Did he ever tell you why he was crying on the phone – what it was he *had* to tell you?

MICHAEL. No. It must have been that he'd left Fran. Or maybe it was something else, and he changed his mind.

DONALD. Maybe so.

(A beat.)

I wonder why he left her.

(A pause.)

MICHAEL. ...As my father said to me when he died in my arms, "I don't understand any of it. I never did."

(A beat. DONALD goes to his stack of books, selects one, and sits in a chair.)

Turn out the lights when you leave, will you?

(DONALD nods. MICHAEL looks at him for a long, silent moment. DONALD turns his attention to his book and starts to read. MICHAEL opens the door and exits.)