
HERBERT

HERBERT
MURIEL

MURIEL. I never heard of him.

HERBERT. You just said his name.

MURIEL. You've been saying it here for an hour. I just repeated it.

HERBERT. You said "Bernie Walters."

MURIEL. I said I never heard of him, and besides I wasn't married to Harry when I met you. It was George. If I'd been married to Harry, I wouldn't have looked at you. Fine, strapping man . . . may he rest in peace. Oh, what he did in Venice!

HERBERT. You see, it was Harry in Venice.

MURIEL. Of course it was Harry in Venice.

HERBERT. You said it was me.

MURIEL. You? Huh? You wouldn't have it in you to do a thing like that.

HERBERT. What? A thing like what?

MURIEL. (*Laughs.*) Don't be jealous of a dead man. I've done my best to forget him, George, like I promised when I married you.

HERBERT. I'm Herbert.

MURIEL. Do you keep repeating it so you won't forget who you are?

HERBERT. You called me George just now.

MURIEL. A hearing aid's a cheap thing. . . .

HERBERT. See here, Grace. . . .

MURIEL. I'm Muriel.

HERBERT. You talk about me. . . . What about you? "Muriel. I'm Muriel."

MURIEL. Cuckoo!

HERBERT. (*He takes up his binoculars.*) **Where?** I wouldn't call you Grace. Grace was soft and gentle and kind.

MURIEL. Why'd you leave her then?

HERBERT. I didn't. She died.

MURIEL. Mary died. Your first wife. You got sick of Grace and left her and married me.

HERBERT. Left Grace for you?

MURIEL. Yes, you silly old man.

HERBERT. All wrong. Grace was my darling.

MURIEL. She drove you crazy.

HERBERT. My first love.

MURIEL. Mary.

HERBERT. Mary drove me crazy.

MURIEL. She was your first love. You've told me about it often enough. The two of you young colts prancing around in the nude.

HERBERT. Mary?

MURIEL. Yes.

HERBERT. I never saw Mary naked. That was her trouble. Cold woman.

MURIEL. That was Grace.

HERBERT. Grace I saw naked. Oh, how naked! There was never anyone nakeder.

MURIEL. You can only be naked. You can't be more or less naked.

HERBERT. You didn't know Grace.

MURIEL. Mary. I did know Grace.

HERBERT. Naked?

MURIEL. Keep a civil tongue in your head.

HERBERT. I never saw you naked.

MURIEL. No, and not likely to. What'd be the point? You couldn't do anything about it.

HERBERT. Oh, that's what you think.

MURIEL. You married me at seventy . . . and you were through then. . . . Except for dreaming.

HERBERT. You're lying. We had some good go's together, down by the beach.

MURIEL. You and I were never near a beach. And you were never near me in that way.

HERBERT. Old women forget . . . forget the joys of the flesh. Why is that?

MURIEL. I don't forget Bernie.

HERBERT. Who?

MURIEL. Bernie Walters.

HERBERT. Never heard of him.

MURIEL. My second husband. I was married to him when Harry came along. . . . But Harry went away and then you came along . . . a long time after. Platonic marriage. That's what we've had, you and I, George. But it's all right.

HERBERT. Platonic under the willow tree that June?

MURIEL. What willow tree?

HERBERT. Oh, I've been good to you, Mary, for all your carping and your falling off in your old age, because I remember that willow tree. Muriel never knew about it. We were wicked.

MURIEL. If I thought you knew what you were talking about, I'd get mad. But I know you're just babbling. Babbling Bernie. . . . That's you. Herbert used to say "How can you listen to him babble?"

HERBERT. I'm Herbert.

MURIEL. If it makes you feel more secure. Go on. Keep reminding yourself.

HERBERT. You called me Bernie.

MURIEL. Oh, sure, sure. And you've never been to Chicago.

HERBERT. I have so. I went there when my daughter died.

MURIEL. Well, I'm glad you admit it.

HERBERT. Why shouldn't I admit it? It's so. You just try to confuse me . . . Bernie, Harry, George, Grace, Mary.

MURIEL. You started a long time ago, slipping. Only then you were more honest about it. Very touching. When we went to Florida and you gave me the tickets and said, "Grace, my mind's slipping, take care of the tickets."

HERBERT. Your name's Muriel.

MURIEL. Yes, yes, lovey. My name's Muriel.

HERBERT. You referred to yourself as "Grace."

MURIEL. (*Sarcastic.*) Oh, very likely. Very likely.

HERBERT. You said I gave you the tickets to Florida and said, "Grace, my mind's slipping."

MURIEL. Well, it was.

HERBERT. I've never been to Florida.

MURIEL. Ho-ho. Well, let's not go into it. The pongee suit.

HERBERT. I never owned a pongee suit.

MURIEL. You said it was the same suit you wore when you married Helen, and we had a long discussion about how ironic it was that you were wearing the same suit to run away with me.

HERBERT. Who's Helen?

MURIEL. You were married to her, silly.

HERBERT. I was running away to Florida with you and I was so old my mind was slipping and I couldn't remember the tickets?

MURIEL. Lovey, you're running a lot of things that happened at different times together now. Maybe you should just sit quietly for a while, Harry, till you get straightened out.

HERBERT. My name is Herbert.

MURIEL. That's right. We'll start from there. You're Herbert and I'm Grace.

HERBERT. You're Muriel.

MURIEL. That's right. Now let's just leave it at that now, or you won't sleep tonight.

HERBERT. I always sleep.

MURIEL. A fortune for sleeping pills.

HERBERT. I never had one in my life.

MURIEL. And you've never been to Chicago either, I suppose.

HERBERT. Never. Why should I have gone to Chicago?

MURIEL. Only because our daughter died there and we went to the funeral.

HERBERT. We had no children together.

MURIEL. I think we shouldn't talk any more now. You're getting confused.

HERBERT. You never let me near your lily-white body.

MURIEL. Ho-ho . . . and what about that afternoon under the willow tree? I think that's when we conceived Ralph.

HERBERT. Who is Ralph?

MURIEL. Ralph is your stepson. Good God!

HERBERT. I conceived my stepson under the willow tree?

MURIEL. I'd prefer it if we just remained quiet for a while. You can't follow a train of thought for more than a moment . . . and it's very tiring trying to jump back and forth with you. Just close your eyes and rest. . . . Are your eyes hurting you?

HERBERT. No.

MURIEL. That medicine must be very good then.

HERBERT. What medicine?

MURIEL. You see, that's what I mean.

HERBERT. I never had any medicine for my eyes.

MURIEL. Yes, all right. All right. Let's not argue, George.

HERBERT. I'm Harry.

MURIEL. Yes, yes. All right. We'll just hold hands here, and try to doze a little . . . and think of happier days. . . . *(She takes his hand and they close their eyes and rock.)*

HERBERT. *(After a long moment.)* Mmmmm . . . Venice.

MURIEL. *(Dreamy.)* Yes. . . . Oh, yes. . . . Wasn't that lovely. . . . Oh, you were so gallant . . . if slightly shocking. . . . *(She laughs, remembering.)*

HERBERT. The beach. . . .

MURIEL. The willow tree. . . .