

Michael Alan Veronica Annette

~~shareholders meetings in two weeks. Do you have an insurance contingency to cover litigation?~~ ... OK ... Oh, and Murray, Murray, ask your PR gal to find out if this story shows up anywhere else ... Call me back. *(He hangs up.)* ... Excuse me.

MICHAEL. So you're ...

ALAN. A lawyer.

ANNETTE. What about you?

MICHAEL. Me, I have a wholesale company, household goods; and Veronica's a writer and works part-time in an art history bookshop.

ANNETTE. A writer?

VERONICA. I contributed to a collection on the civilization of Sheba, based on the excavations that were restarted at the end of the Ethiopian-Eritrean war. And I have a book coming out in January on the Darfur tragedy.

ANNETTE. So you specialize in Africa.

VERONICA. I'm very interested in that part of the world.

ANNETTE. Do you have any other children?

VERONICA. Henry has a nine-year-old sister, Camille. Who's furious at her father because last night her father got rid of the hamster.

ANNETTE. You got rid of the hamster?

MICHAEL. Yes. This hamster makes the most godawful racket all night, then spends the whole day fast asleep! Henry was in a lot of pain last night; he was being driven crazy by the noise that the hamster was making. And, to tell you the truth, I've been wanting to get rid of it for a long time, so I said to myself, OK, that's it, I took it and put it in the street. I thought they loved drains and gutters and all that, but I guess not, it just sat there paralyzed on the sidewalk. Well, they're not domestic animals, they're not wild animals, I don't really know where their natural habitat is. Dump them in the woods, they're probably just as unhappy, so I don't know where you're supposed to put them.

ANNETTE. You left it outside?

VERONICA. He left it there and tried to convince Camille it had run away. But she wasn't having it.

ALAN. Was the hamster gone this morning?

MICHAEL. Gone, yes.

VERONICA. And you, what field are you in?

ANNETTE. I'm in wealth management.

VERONICA. Is it at all possible ... forgive me for putting the question so bluntly, that Benjamin might apologize to Henry?

ALAN. It'd be good if they talked.

ANNETTE. He has to apologize, Alan. He has to tell him he's sorry.

ALAN. Yes, yes. Of course.

VERONICA. But is he sorry?

ALAN. He realizes what he's done. He just doesn't understand the implications. He's eleven.

VERONICA. If you're eleven, you're not a baby any more.

MICHAEL. You're not an adult either! We haven't offered you anything, coffee, tea, is there any of that clafouti left, Ronnie? It's an extraordinary clafouti!

~~ALAN. I wouldn't mind an espresso~~

~~ANNETTE. Just some water~~

MICHAEL. ~~(To Veronica, on her way out.)~~ Espresso for me too, sweetie, and bring the clafouti anyway. ~~(After a hiatus.)~~ What I always say is, we're a lump of potter's clay and it's up to us to fashion something out of it. Perhaps it won't take shape till the very end. Who knows?

ANNETTE. Mm.

MICHAEL. You have to taste the clafouti. Good clafouti is an endangered species.

ANNETTE. Worse. You left it, shivering with terror, in a hostile environment. That poor hamster is bound to have been eaten by a dog or a rat.

VERONICA. It's true! That is true!

MICHAEL. What do you mean, that is true!

VERONICA. It's true. What do you expect me to say? It's appalling what must have happened to that creature.

MICHAEL. I thought the hamster would be happy to be liberated. I thought it was going to run off down the gutter, jumping for joy!

VERONICA. Well, it didn't.

ANNETTE. And you abandoned it.

MICHAEL. I can't touch those things! For fuck's sake, Ronnie, you know very well, I'm incapable of touching that whole species!

VERONICA. He has a phobia about rodents.

MICHAEL. That's right, I'm frightened of rodents, I'm terrified of snakes, anything close to the ground, I don't want them near me. So that's the end of it!

ALAN. *(To Veronica.)* And you, why didn't you go out and look for it?

VERONICA. Because I had no idea what had happened! Michael didn't tell us, me and the children, that the hamster had escaped, till the following morning. I went out immediately, immediately, I walked around the block, I even went down to the basement.

MICHAEL. Veronica, I find it intolerable to be on trial all of a sudden for this hamster saga that you've seen fit to reveal. It's a personal matter which is nobody else's business but ours and which has nothing to do with the present situation! And I find it incomprehensible to be called a killer! In my own home!

VERONICA. What's your home got to do with it?

MICHAEL. My home, the doors of which I have opened, the doors of which I have opened wide in a spirit of reconciliation, to people who ought to be grateful to me for it!

ALAN. It's wonderful the way you keep patting yourself on the back.

ANNETTE. Don't you feel any guilt?

MICHAEL. I feel no guilt whatsoever. I've always found that creature repulsive. I'm ecstatic that it's gone.

VERONICA. Michael, that's ridiculous.

MICHAEL. What's ridiculous? Have you gone crazy as well? Their son beats up Henry, and I get shit on because of a hamster?

~~of time, it weakens you and undermines you~~

ALAN. Right, come on, Annette, let's go, enough preaching and sermons for today.

MICHAEL. Go on, go. But can I say one thing? Having met you two, it's pretty clear that for what's-his-name, Benjamin, there are mitigating circumstances.

ANNETTE. When you murdered that hamster ...

MICHAEL. Murdered?!

ANNETTE. Yes.

MICHAEL. I murdered the hamster?!

ANNETTE. Yes. You've done your best to make us feel guilty, but your virtue went straight out the window once you decided to be a killer.

MICHAEL. I absolutely did not murder that hamster!

~~hangs up.) She's killing me. One pain in the balls after another.~~

ANNETTE. Right then, what have we decided? Shall I come back this evening with Benjamin? No one seems to give a rat's ass anymore. All the same, I should point out, that's what we're here for.

VERONICA. Now I'm starting to feel nauseous. Where's the pan? *(Michael takes the bottle of rum out of Annette's reach.)*

MICHAEL. That's enough.

ANNETTE. In my mind, there are wrongs on both sides. That's it. Wrongs on both sides.

VERONICA. Are you serious?

ANNETTE. What?

VERONICA. Are you aware of what you're saying?

ANNETTE. I am. Yes.

VERONICA. Our son Henry, to whom I was obliged to give two Extra-Strength Tylenol last night, is in the wrong?

ANNETTE. He's not necessarily innocent.

VERONICA. Fuck off! I've had quite enough of you. *(She grabs Annette's handbag and hurls it towards the door.)* Fuck off!

ANNETTE. My purse! ... *(Like a little girl.)* Alan! ...

MICHAEL. What's going on? They've lost their shit.

ANNETTE. *(Gathering up her scattered possessions.)* Alan, help! ...

VERONICA. "Alan, help!"

ANNETTE. Shut up! ... She's broken my compact! And my spray bottle! *(To Alan.)* Defend me, why aren't you defending me? ...

ALAN. We're going. *(He prepares to gather up the parts of his cell phone.)*

VERONICA. It's not as if I'm strangling her!

ANNETTE. What have I done to you?

VERONICA. There are not wrongs on both sides! Don't mix up the victims and the executioners!

ANNETTE. Executioners!

MICHAEL. You're so full of shit, Veronica, all this simplistic baloney, we're up to here with it!

VERONICA. I stand by everything I've said.

MICHAEL. Yes, yes, you stand by what you've said, you stand by what you've said, your infatuation for a bunch of Sudanese coons is bleeding into everything now.

VERONICA. I'm appalled. Why are you choosing to show yourself in this horrible light?

MICHAEL. Because I feel like it. I feel like showing myself in a horrible light.

VERONICA. One day you may understand the extreme gravity of what's going on in that part of the world and you'll be ashamed of this inertia and your repulsive nihilism.

MICHAEL. You're just wonderful, Darjeeling, you're the best of us all!

VERONICA. I am. Yes.

ANNETTE. Let's get out of here, Alan, these people are monsters! *(She drains her glass and goes to pick up the bottle.)*

ALAN. *(Preventing her.)* ... Stop it, Annette.

ANNETTE. No, I want to drink some more, I want to get bombed out of my mind, this bitch hurls my purse across the room and no one bats an eye, I want to get drunk!

ALAN. You already are.

ANNETTE. ~~Why are you ... call my son an executioner?~~

~~MICHAEL. What about you, do you have other children?  
ALAN. A son from my first marriage.~~

MICHAEL. I was wondering, not that it's at all important, what started the fight. Henry won't say one single word about it.

ANNETTE. Henry refused to let Benjamin join his gang.

VERONICA. Henry has a gang?

ALAN. He also called Benjamin a snitch.

VERONICA. Did you know Henry had a gang?

MICHAEL. No. That's terrific!

VERONICA. Why is it terrific?

MICHAEL. Because I had my own gang.

ALAN. Me too.

Annette Veronica Michael Alan

VERONICA. And what does that entail?

MICHAEL. There are five or six kids that follow you and are ready to sacrifice themselves. Like in *Spartacus*.

ALAN. Absolutely, like in *Spartacus*!

VERONICA. Who knows about *Spartacus* these days?

ALAN. They use a different model. Spiderman.

VERONICA. Anyway, clearly you know more than we do. Benjamin hasn't been as silent as you implied. And do we know why Henry called him a snitch? No, sorry, stupid, that's a stupid question. First of all, I couldn't care less, also, it's beside the point.

ANNETTE. We can't get involved in children's quarrels.

VERONICA. And it's none of our business.

ANNETTE. No.

VERONICA. On the other hand, what is our business is what unfortunately happened. The violence, that's our business.

MICHAEL. To become the head of my gang, when I was twelve, I had to fight Bobby Kopecki, who was bigger than me, one-on-one, single combat.

VERONICA. What are you talking about, Michael? What's that got to do with it?

MICHAEL. No, you're right, it's got nothing to do with it.

VERONICA. We're not discussing single combat. The children weren't fighting.

MICHAEL. I know, I know. I just suddenly had a flashback.

ALAN. There's not that big a difference.

VERONICA. Oh, yes, there is. Excuse me, there's a very big difference.

MICHAEL. There's a very big difference.

ALAN. What?

MICHAEL. With Bobby Kopecki, we'd agreed to have a fight.

ALAN. Did you beat the shit out of him?

MICHAEL. Up to a point.

VERONICA. Alright, can we forget Bobby Kopecki? Would you allow me to speak to Benjamin?

ANNETTE. By all means!

VERONICA. I wouldn't want to do it without your permission.

ANNETTE. Speak to him. What could be more natural?

ALAN. Good luck.

ANNETTE. Stop it, Alan. I don't understand you.

ALAN. Mrs. Novak ...

VERONICA. Veronica. We don't have to be so formal.

ALAN. Veronica, you're motivated by an educational impulse, which is very sympathetic ...

VERONICA. If you don't want me to speak to him, I won't speak to him.

ALAN. No, speak to him, read him the riot act, do what you like.

VERONICA. I don't understand why you don't seem to care about this.

ALAN. Ma'am ...

MICHAEL. Veronica.

ALAN. Of course I care, Veronica, enormously. My son has injured another child ...

VERONICA. On purpose.

ALAN. See, that's the kind of remark that gets my back up. Obviously, on purpose.

VERONICA. But that makes all the difference.

ALAN. The difference between what and what? That's what we're talking about. Our son picked up a stick and hit your son. That's why we're here, isn't it?

ANNETTE. This is pointless.

MICHAEL. Yes, she's right, this kind of argument is pointless.

ALAN. Why do you feel the need to slide in on purpose? What kind of message is that supposed to be sending me?

ANNETTE. Listen, we're on a slippery slope, my husband is desperate about all kinds of other things, I'll come back this evening with Benjamin and we'll let things sort themselves out naturally.

ALAN. I'm not in the least bit desperate.

ANNETTE. Well, I am.

MICHAEL. There's nothing to be desperate about.

ANNETTE. Yes, there is. *(Alan's cell phone vibrates.)* X

~~ALAN. ... Don't make any statement ... No comment ... No, of course you can't take it off the market! If you take it off the market, you become responsible ... The minute you take Ann off the market, you're admitting liability! There's nothing in the annual accounts. If you want to be sued for falsifying the executive report and get shutcanned in two weeks, take it off the market ...~~

~~VERONICA. Last year, on Parents' Day, wasn't it Benjamin who was in that play ...~~

~~ANNETTE. Charley's Aunt.~~

~~VERONICA. Charley's Aunt.~~