

by the same author

YASMINA REZA: PLAYS ONE

'ART'

THE UNEXPECTED MAN
CONVERSATIONS AFTER A BURIAL
LIFE X 3

HAMMERKLAVIER
a novel

Sides for God of Carnage Auditions

Alan Ralieggh (Lawyer)
Annette Raleigh (Puker)

Michael Novak (Hamster Killer)
Veronica Novak (Art Books and Writer)

Group Sides

A:

All: Pages 3-8 (Stop at Alan answering the phone)

B:

All: Pages 22 (Alain on the phone) to page 25

C:

All: (with focus on Michael and Veronica at end) Page 28 (Michael: Give her some Pepto-Bismol.) to 32 (Veronica: I just steamrollered her about...)

D:

All: (Higher Intensity, less Alan) Page 37 (Michael: Go on, go. But can I say one thing?...) to page 42 (Michael: Stop it, Ronnie...)

E:

All: Page 46 (Alan speech at bottom) to bottom of 50 (Alan: Michael's point of view is, I'm sorry to say, entirely sound.)

F:

All: Page 65 (Michael: They don't give a fuck...) to end of play.

YASMINA REZA

The God of Carnage

translated by
Christopher Hampton

Sides Marked in Blue



faber and faber

*A living room. No realism.
Nothing superfluous.*

The Vallons and the Reilles, sitting down, facing one another. We need to sense right away that the place belongs to the Vallons and that the two couples have just met.

*In the centre, a coffee table, covered with art books.
Two big bunches of tulips in vases.*

The prevailing mood is serious, friendly and tolerant.

A ↓
Véronique So, this is our statement – you'll be doing your own, of course . . . 'At 5.30 p.m. on the 3rd November, in Aspirant Dunant Gardens, following a verbal altercation, Ferdinand Reille, eleven, armed with a stick, struck our son, Bruno Vallon, in the face. This action resulted in, apart from a swelling of the upper lip, the breaking of two incisors, including injury to the nerve in the right incisor.'

Alain Armed?

Véronique Armed? You don't like 'armed' – what shall we say, Michel, furnished, equipped, furnished with a stick, is that all right?

Alain Furnished, yes.

Michel 'Furnished with a stick'.

Véronique (*making the correction*) Furnished. The irony is, we've always regarded Aspirant Dunant Gardens as a haven of security, unlike the Montsouris Park.

Michel She's right. We've always said the Montsouris Park no, Aspirant Dunant Gardens yes.

Véronique Absolutely. Anyway, thank you for coming. There's nothing to be gained from getting stuck down some emotional cul-de-sac.

Annette We should be thanking you. We should.

Véronique I don't see that any thanks are necessary. Fortunately, there is still such a thing as the art of co-existence, is there not?

Alain Which the children don't appear to have mastered. At least, not ours!

Annette Yes, not ours! . . . What's going to happen to the tooth with the affected nerve? . . .

Véronique We don't know yet. They're being cautious about the prognosis. Apparently the nerve hasn't been totally exposed.

Michel Only a bit of it's been exposed.

Véronique Yes. Some of it's been exposed and some of it's still covered. That's why they've decided not to kill the nerve just yet.

Michel They're trying to give the tooth a chance.

Véronique Obviously it would be best to avoid endodontic surgery.

Annette Well, yes . . .

Véronique So there'll be an interim period while they give the nerve a chance to recover.

Michel In the meantime, they'll be giving him ceramic crowns.

Véronique Whatever happens, you can't have an implant before you're eighteen.

Michel No.

Véronique Permanent implants can't be fitted until you finish growing.

Annette Of course. I hope . . . I do hope it all works out.

Véronique Let's hope so.

Slight hiatus.

Annette Those tulips are gorgeous.

Véronique It's that little florist's in the Mouton-Duvernét Market. You know, the one right up the top.

Annette Oh, yes.

Véronique They come every morning direct from Holland, ten euros for a bunch of fifty.

Annette Oh, really!

Véronique You know, the one right up the top.

Annette Yes, yes.

Véronique You know he didn't want to identify Ferdinand.

Michel No, he didn't.

Véronique Impressive sight, that child, face bashed in, teeth missing, still refusing to talk.

Annette I can imagine.

Michel He also didn't want to identify him for fear of looking like a sneak in front of his friends; we have to be honest, Véronique, it was nothing more than bravado.

Véronique Of course, but bravado is a kind of courage, isn't it?

Annette That's right . . . So how . . . ? What I mean is, how did you find out Ferdinand's name? . . .

Véronique Well, we explained to Bruno he wasn't helping this child by shielding him.

Michel We said to him if this child thinks he can go on hitting people with impunity, why should he stop?

Véronique We said to him, if we were this boy's parents, we would definitely want to be told.

Annette Absolutely.

Alain Yes . . .

His mobile vibrates.

Excuse me . . .

He moves away from the group; as he talks, he pulls a newspaper out of his pocket.

. . . Yes, Maurice, thanks for calling back. Right, in today's *Le Monde*, let me read it to you . . . 'According to a paper published in the *Lancet* and taken up yesterday in the *FT*, two Australian researchers have revealed the neurological side-effects of Anril, a hypertensive beta-blocker, manufactured at the Verenz-Pharma laboratories. These side-effects range from hearing loss to ataxia . . . ' So who the hell is your media watchdog? . . . Yes, it's very bloody inconvenient . . . No, what's most inconvenient about it as far as I'm concerned is the AGM's in two weeks. Do you have an insurance contingency to cover litigation? . . . OK . . . Oh, and Maurice, Maurice, ask your DOC to find out if this story shows up anywhere else . . . Call me back.

He hangs up.

. . . Excuse me.

Michel So you're . . .

Alain A lawyer.

Annette What about you?

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

Annette A writer?

Véronique I contributed to a collection on the civilisation 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 specialise in Africa.

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

Annette Do you have any other children?

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

Annette You got rid of the hamster?

Michel Yes. That hamster made the most appalling racket all night. Then it spent the whole day fast asleep. Bruno was in a very bad way, he was driven crazy by the noise that hamster made. As for me, to tell you the truth, I've been wanting to get rid of it for ages, so I said to myself, right, that's it. I took it and put it out in the street. I thought they loved drains and gutters and so on, but not a bit of it, it just sat there paralysed on the pavement. Well, they're not domestic animals, they're not wild animals, I don't know where their natural habitat is. Dump them in the woods, they're probably just as unhappy. I don't know where you're meant to put them.

Annette You left it outside?

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

Alain And had the hamster vanished this morning?

Michel Vanished.

Véronique And you, what field are you in?

Annette I'm in wealth-management.

Véronique Is it at all possible – forgive me for putting the question so bluntly – that Ferdinand might apologise to Bruno?

Alain It'd be good if they talked.

Annette He has to apologise, Alain. He has to tell him he's sorry.

Alain Yes, yes. Of course.

Véronique But is he sorry?

Alain He realises what he's done. He just doesn't understand the implications. He's eleven.

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

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

Alain I wouldn't mind an espresso.

Annette Just some water.

Michel (to Véronique, on her way out) Espresso for me too, darling, and bring the *clafoutis* 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.

Michel You have to taste the *clafoutis*. Good *clafoutis* is an endangered species.

Annette You're right.

Alain What is it you sell?

Michel Domestic hardware. Locks, doorknobs, soldering irons, all sorts of household goods, saucepans, frying pans . . .

Alain Money in that, is there?

Michel Well, you know, it's never exactly been a bonanza, it was pretty hard when we started. But provided I'm out there every day pushing my product, it rubs along. At least it's not seasonal, like textiles. Although we do sell a lot of *foie gras* pots in the run-up to Christmas!

Alain I'm sure . . .

Annette When you saw the hamster sitting there, paralysed, why didn't you bring it back home?

Michel Because I couldn't pick it up.

Annette You put it on the pavement.

Michel I took it out in its cage and sort of tipped it out. I just can't touch rodents.

Véronique comes back with a tray. Drinks and the clafoutis.

Véronique I don't know who put the *clafoutis* in the fridge. Monica puts everything in the fridge, she won't be told. What's Ferdinand said to you? Sugar?

Alain No, thanks. What's in the *clafoutis*?

Véronique Apples and pears.

Annette Apples and pears?

Annette Monsieur de Pourceaugnac.

Véronique Monsieur de Pourceaugnac.

Alain We'll think about the victims later, Maurice . . .
Let's see what the shares do after the AGM . . .

Véronique He was extraordinary.

Annette Yes . . .

Alain We are not going to take the medicine off the market just because two or three people are bumping into the furniture! . . . Don't make any statements for the time being . . . Yes. I'll call you back . . .

He cuts him off and phones his colleague.

Véronique I remember him very clearly in *Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*. Do you remember him, Michel?

Michel Yes, yes . . .

Véronique He was hilarious when he was in drag.

Annette Yes . . .

B
↓
Alain *(to his colleague)* . . . They're panicking, they've got the media up their arse, you have to prepare a press release, not something defensive, not at all, on the contrary, go out all guns blazing, you insist that Verenz-Pharma is the victim of a destabilisation attempt two weeks before its Annual General Meeting, where does this paper come from, why should it have fallen out of the sky just now, etcetera and so on . . . Don't say anything about health problems, just ask one question: who's behind this report? . . . Right.

He hangs up. Brief hiatus.

Michel They're terrible, these pharmaceutical companies. Profit, profit, profit.

Alain You're not supposed to be listening to my conversation.

Michel You're not obliged to have it in front of me.

Alain Yes, I am. I'm absolutely obliged to have it here. Not my choice, I can assure you.

Michel They dump any old crap on you without giving it a second thought.

Alain In the therapeutic field, every advance brings with it risk as well as benefit.

Michel Yes, I understand that. All the same. Funny job you've got.

Alain Meaning?

Véronique Michel, this is nothing to do with us.

Michel Funny job.

Alain And what is it you do?

Michel I have an ordinary job.

Alain What is an ordinary job?

Michel I told you, I sell saucepans.

Alain And doorknobs.

Michel And toilet fittings. Loads of other things.

Alain Ah, toilet fittings. Now we're talking. That's really interesting.

Annette Alain.

Alain It's really interesting. I'm interested in toilet fittings.

Michel Why shouldn't you be?

Alain How many types are there?

Michel Two different systems. Push-button or overhead flush.

Alain I see.

Michel Depending on the feed.

Alain Well, yes.

Michel Either the water comes down from above or up from under.

Alain Yes.

Michel I could introduce you to one of my warehousemen who specialises in this kind of thing, if you like. You'd have to leg it out to Saint-Denis la Plaine.

Alain You seem to be very much on top of the subject.

Véronique Are you intending to punish Ferdinand in any way? You can carry on with the plumbing in some more appropriate setting.

Annette I'm not feeling well.

Véronique What's the matter?

Alain Yes, you're very pale, sweetheart.

Michel Palish, certainly.

Annette I feel sick.

Véronique Sick? . . . I have some Moxalon . . .

Annette No, no . . . It'll be all right . . .

Véronique What could we . . . ? Coke. Coke's very good.

She immediately sets off in search of it.

Annette It'll be all right . . .

Michel Walk around a bit. Take a few steps.

She takes a few steps. Véronique comes back with the Coca-Cola.

Annette Really? You think so? . . .

Véronique Yes, yes. Small sips.

Annette Thank you . . .

Alain has discreetly called his office.

Alain . . . Give me Serge, will you, please? . . . Oh, right . . . Ask him to call me back, ask him to call me back right away . . .

He hangs up.

It's good, is it, Coca-Cola? I thought it was just supposed to be for diarrhoea.

Véronique Not only for that. (To Annette.) All right?

Annette All right . . . Véronique, if we want to reprimand our child, we'll do it in our own way and without having to account to anybody.

Michel Absolutely.

Véronique What do you mean, 'absolutely', Michel?

Michel They can do whatever they like with their son, it's their prerogative.

Véronique I don't think so.

Michel What do you mean, you don't think so, Ronnie?

Véronique I don't think it is their prerogative.

Alain Really? Explain.

His mobile vibrates.

I'm sorry . . . (To his colleague.) Excellent . . . But don't forget, nothing's been proved, there's nothing definite . . .

Véronique Well, it's certainly not the *clafoutis*, it couldn't possibly be.

Michel It's not the *clafoutis*, it's nerves. This is pure nerves.

Véronique (to Alain) Would you like to clean up in the bathroom? Oh, no, the Kokoschka! Oh, my God!

Annette vomits bile into the basin.

Michel Give her some Moxalon.

Véronique Not now, she can't keep anything down.

Alain Where's the bathroom?

Véronique I'll show you.

Véronique and Alain leave.

Michel It's nerves. It's a panic attack. You're a mum, Annette. Whether you want to be or not. I understand why you feel desperate.

Annette Mmm.

Michel What I always say is, you can't control the things that control you.

Annette Mmm . . .

Michel With me, it's the cervical vertebrae. The vertebrae seize up.

Annette Mmm . . .

She brings up a little more bile. Véronique returns with another basin, containing a sponge.

Véronique What are we going to do about the Kokoschka?

Michel Well, I would spray it with Mr Clean . . . The problem is how to dry it . . . Or else you could sponge it down and put a bit of perfume on it.

Véronique Perfume?

Michel Use my Kouros, I never wear it.

Véronique It'll warp.

Michel We could run the hair-dryer over it and flatten it out under a pile of other books. Or iron it like they do with banknotes.

Véronique Oh, my God . . .

Annette I'll buy you another one.

Véronique You can't find it! It went out of print years ago!

Annette I'm terribly sorry . . .

Michel We'll salvage it. Let me do it, Ronnie.

She hands him the basin of water and the sponge, disgusted. Michel gets started on cleaning up the book.

Véronique It's a reprint of the catalogue from the '53 London exhibition, more than twenty years old! . . .

Michel Go and get the hair-dryer. And the Kouros. In the towel cupboard.

Véronique Her husband's in the bathroom.

Michel Well, he's not stark naked, is he?

She goes out as he continues to clean up.

. . . There, that's the worst of it. *The People of the Tundra* needs a bit of a wipe . . . I'll be back.

He goes out with the used basin. Véronique and Michel return more or less simultaneously. She has the bottle of perfume, he has the basin containing fresh water. Michel finishes cleaning up.

Véronique (to Annette) Feeling better?

Annette Yes . . .

Véronique Shall I spray?

Michel Where's the hair-dryer?

Véronique He's bringing it when he's finished with it.

Michel We'll wait for him. We'll put the Kouros on last thing.

Annette Can I use the bathroom as well?

Véronique Yes. Yes, yes. Of course.

Annette I can't tell you how sorry I am . . .

Véronique takes her out and returns immediately.

Véronique What a nightmare! Horrible!

Michel Tell you what, he'd better not push me much further.

Véronique She's dreadful as well.

Michel Not as bad.

Véronique She's a phoney.

Michel Less irritating.

Véronique They're both dreadful! Why do you keep siding with them?

She sprays the tulips.

Michel I don't keep siding with them, what are you talking about?

Véronique You keep vacillating, trying to play both ends against the middle.

Michel Not at all!

Véronique Yes, you do. Going on about your triumphs as a gang leader, telling them they're free to do whatever they like with their son when the child is a public menace – when a child's a public menace, it's everybody's concern, I can't believe she puked all over my books!

She sprays the Kokoschka.

Michel (pointing) Put some on *The People of the Tundra*.

Véronique If you think you're about to spew, you go to the proper place.

Michel . . . And the Foujita.

Véronique (spraying everything) This is disgusting.

Michel I was pushing it a bit with the shithouse systems.

Véronique You were brilliant.

Michel Good answers, don't you think?

Véronique Brilliant. The warehouseman was brilliant.

Michel What an asshole. And what did he call her?! . . .

Véronique Woof-woof.

Michel That's right, 'Woof-woof'!

Véronique Woof-woof!

They both laugh. Alain returns, hair-dryer in hand.

Alain That's right, I call her Woof-woof.

Véronique Oh . . . I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be rude . . . It's so easy to make fun of other people's nicknames! What about us, what do we call each other, Michel? Far worse, isn't it?

Alain Were you wanting the hair-dryer?

Véronique Thank you.

Michel Thank you.

He takes the hair-dryer.

We call each other 'darjeeling', like the tea. Far more ridiculous, if you ask me!

Michel switches on the machine and starts drying the books. Véronique flattens out the damp pages.

Smooth them out, smooth them out.

Véronique *(as she smooths out the pages, raising her voice above the noise)* How's the poor thing feeling, better?

Alain Better.

Véronique I reacted very badly, I'm ashamed of myself.

Alain Not at all.

Véronique I just steamrollered her about my catalogue, I can't believe I did that.

Michel Turn the page. Stretch it out, stretch it out properly.

Alain You're going to tear it.

Véronique You're right . . . That's enough, Michel, it's dry. Objects can become ridiculously important, half the time you can't even remember why.

Michel shuts the catalogue and they both cover it with a little cairn of heavy books. Michel finishes drying the Foujita, The People of the Tundra, etc. . . .

Michel There we are! Good as new. Where does 'Woof-woof' come from?

Alain 'How much is that doggie in the window?'

Michel I know it! *(He sings.)* 'The one with the waggly tail.'

Alain 'Woof-woof.'

Michel Ha, ha! . . . Ours comes from our honeymoon in India. Idiotic, really!

Véronique Shouldn't I go and see how she is?

Michel Off you go, darjeeling.

Véronique Shall I? . . .

Annette returns.

. . . Ah, Annette! I was worried about you . . . Are you feeling better?

Annette I think so.

Alain If you're not sure, stay away from the coffee table.

Annette I left the towel in the bathtub, I wasn't sure where to put it.

Véronique Perfect.

Annette You've cleaned it all up. I'm so sorry.

Michel Everything's great. Everything's in order.

Véronique Annette, forgive me, I've taken hardly any notice of you. I've been obsessed with my Kokoschka.

Annette Don't worry about it.

Véronique The way I reacted, very bad of me.

Annette Not at all . . . *(After an embarrassed hiatus.)* Something occurred to me in the bathroom . . .

Véronique Yes?

Annette Perhaps we skated too hastily over . . .
I mean, what I mean is . . .

Véronique There's no origin. There's just an eleven-year-old child hitting someone. With a stick.

Alain Armed with a stick.

Michel We withdrew that word.

Alain You withdrew it because we objected to it.

Michel We withdrew it without any protest.

Alain A word deliberately designed to rule out error or clumsiness, to rule out childhood.

Véronique I'm not sure I'm able to take much more of this tone of voice.

Alain You and I have had trouble seeing eye to eye right from the start.

Véronique There's nothing more detestable than to be attacked for something you yourself consider a mistake. The word 'armed' was inappropriate, so we changed it. Although, if you stick to the strict definition of the word, its use is far from inaccurate.

Annette Ferdinand was insulted and he reacted. If I'm attacked, I defend myself, especially if I find myself alone, confronted by a gang.

Michel Puking seems to have perked you up.

Annette Are you aware how crude that sounds?

Michel We're people of good will. All four of us, I'm sure. Why let these irritants, these pointless aggravations push us over the edge? . . .

Véronique Oh, Michel, that's enough! Let's stop beating about the bush. If all we are is moderate on the surface, let's forget it, shall we!

Michel No, no, I refuse to allow myself to slide down that slope.

Alain What slope?

Michel The deplorable slope those two little bastards have perched us on! There, I've said it!

Alain I'm not sure Ronnie has quite the same outlook.

Véronique Véronique!

Alain Sorry.

Véronique So Bruno's a little bastard now, is he, poor child. That's the last straw!

Alain Right, well, I really do have to leave you.

Annette Me too.

D **Véronique** Go on, go, I give up.

The Vallon telephone rings.

Michel Hello? . . . Oh, Mum . . . No, no, we're with some friends, but tell me about it . . . Yes, do whatever the doctor wants you to do . . . They've given you Antril?! Wait a minute, Mum, wait a minute, don't go away . . . (*To Alain.*) Antril's your crap, isn't it? My mother's taking it!

Alain Thousands of people take it.

Michel You stop taking that stuff right now. Do you hear what I'm saying, Mum? Immediately . . . Don't argue, I'll explain later . . . Tell Dr Perolo I'm forbidding you to take it . . . Why luminous? . . . So that you can be seen? . . . That's completely ridiculous . . . All right, we'll talk about it later. Lots of love, Mum. I'll call you back.

He hangs up.

She's hired luminous crutches, so she doesn't get knocked down by a truck. As if someone in her condition would

be strolling down the motorway in the middle of the night. They've given her Anril for her blood pressure.

Alain If she takes it and stays normal, I'll have her called as a witness. Didn't I have a scarf? Ah, there it is.

Michel I do not appreciate your cynicism. If my mother displays the most minor symptom, I'll be initiating a class action.

Alain Oh, that'll happen anyway.

Michel So I should hope.

Annette Goodbye, madame . . .

Véronique Behaving well gets you nowhere. Courtesy is a waste of time, it weakens you and undermines you . . .

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

Michel Go on, go. But can I just say one thing: having met you two, it's pretty clear that for what's-his-name, Ferdinand, there are mitigating circumstances.

Annette When you murdered that hamster . . .

Michel Murdered?!

Annette Yes.

Michel 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.

Michel I absolutely did not murder that hamster!

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.

Véronique It's true! That is true!

Michel What do you mean, 'that is true'?

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

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

Véronique Well, it didn't.

Annette And you abandoned it.

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

Véronique He has a phobia about rodents.

Michel That's right, I'm frightened of rodents, I'm terrified of snakes, anything close to the ground, I have absolutely no rapport with! So that's the end of it!

Alain (to *Véronique*) And you, why didn't you go out and look for it?

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

Michel *Véronique*, I find it intolerable to be in the dock 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!

Véronique What's your home got to do with it?

Michel 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!

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

Annette Don't you feel any guilt?

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

Véronique Michel, that is ridiculous.

Michel What's ridiculous? Have you gone crazy as well? Their son bashes up Bruno, and I get shat on because of a hamster?

Véronique You behaved very badly with that hamster, you can't deny it.

Michel Fuck the hamster!

Véronique You won't be able to say that to your daughter this evening.

Michel Bring her on! I'm not going to let myself be told how to behave by some nine-year-old bruiser.

Alain Hundred per cent behind you there.

Véronique Pathetic.

Michel Careful, Véronique, you be careful, I've been extremely restrained up to now, but I'm two inches away from crossing that line.

Annette And what about Bruno?

Michel What about Bruno?

Annette Isn't he upset?

Michel If you ask me, Bruno has other problems.

Véronique Bruno was less attached to Nibbles.

Michel Grotesque name as well!

Annette If you feel no guilt, why do you expect our son to feel any?

Michel Let me tell you this, I'm up to here with these idiotic discussions. We tried to be nice, we bought tulips, my wife passed me off as a lefty, but the truth is, I can't keep this up any more, I'm fundamentally uncouth.

Alain Aren't we all?

Véronique No. No. I'm sorry, we are not all fundamentally uncouth.

Alain Well, not you, obviously.

Véronique No, not me, thank the Lord.

Michel Not you, darjee, not you, you're a fully evolved woman, you're skid-resistant.

Véronique Why are you attacking me?

Michel I'm not attacking you. Quite the opposite.

Véronique Yes, you're attacking me, you know you are.

Michel You organised this little get-together, I just let myself be recruited . . .

Véronique You let yourself be recruited?

Michel Yes.

Véronique That's detestable.

Michel Not at all. You stand up for civilisation, that's completely to your credit.

Véronique Exactly, I'm standing up for civilisation! And it's lucky there are people prepared to do that! (*She's on*

the brink of tears.) You think being fundamentally uncouth's a better idea?

Alain Come on now, come on . . .

Véronique *(as above)* Is it normal to criticise someone for not being fundamentally uncouth? . . .

Annette No one's saying that. No one's criticising you.

Véronique Yes, they are! . . .

She bursts into tears.

Alain No, they're not!

Véronique What were we supposed to do? Sue you? Not speak to one another and try to slaughter each other with insurance claims?

Michel Stop it, Ronnie . . .

Véronique Stop what?! . . .

Michel You've got things out of proportion . . .

Véronique I don't give a shit! You force yourself to rise above petty-mindedness . . . and you finish up humiliated and completely on your own . . .

Alain's mobile has vibrated.

Alain . . . Yes . . . 'Let them prove it!' . . . 'Prove it' . . . but if you ask me, best not to answer at all . . .

Michel We're always on our own! Everywhere! Who'd like a drop of rum?

Alain . . . Maurice, I'm in a meeting, I'll call you back from the office . . .

He cuts the line.

Véronique So there we are! I'm living with someone who's totally negative.

Alain Who's negative?

Michel I am.

Véronique This was the worst idea! We should never have arranged this meeting!

Michel I told you.

Véronique You told me?

Michel Yes.

Véronique You told me you didn't want to have this meeting?!

Michel I didn't think it was a good idea.

Annette It was a good idea . . .

Michel Oh, please! . . .

He raises the bottle of rum.

Anybody?

Véronique You told me it wasn't a good idea, Michel?!

Michel Think so.

Véronique You think so!

Alain Wouldn't mind a little drop.

Annette Didn't you have to go?

Alain I could manage a small glass, now we've got this far.

Michel pours a glass for Alain.

Véronique You look me in the eye and tell me we weren't in complete agreement about this!

Annette Calm down, Véronique, calm down, this is pointless . . .

Annette Alain.

Véronique Alain, we're not exactly soul-mates, you and me, but, you see, I live with a man who's decided, once and for all, that life is second rate. It's very difficult living with a man who comforts himself with that thought, who doesn't want anything to change, who can't work up any enthusiasm about anything . . .

Michel He doesn't give a fuck. He doesn't give a fuck about any of that.

Véronique You have to believe . . . you have to believe in the possibility of improvement, don't you?

Michel He's the last person you should be telling all this.

Véronique I'll talk to who I like, for fuck's sake!

The telephone rings.

Michel Who the fuck's this now? . . . Yes, Mum . . . He's fine. I say he's fine, he's lost his teeth, but he's fine . . . Yes, he's in pain. He's in pain, but it'll pass. Mum, I'm busy, I'll call you back.

Annette He's still in pain?

Véronique No.

Annette Then why worry your mother?

Véronique He can't help himself. He always has to worry her.

Michel Right, that's enough, Véronique! What is this psychodrama?

Alain Véronique, are we ever interested in anything but ourselves? Of course we'd all like to believe in the possibility of improvement. Of which we could be the architect and which would be in no way self-serving. Does such a thing exist? Some people drag their feet,

it's their strategy, others refuse to acknowledge the passing of time, and drive themselves demented – what difference does it make? People struggle until they're dead. Education, the miseries of the world . . . You're writing a book about Darfur, fine, I can understand you saying to yourself, right, I'm going to choose a massacre, what else does history consist of, and I'm going to write about it. You do what you can to save yourself.

Véronique I'm not writing the book to save myself. You haven't read it, you don't know what it's about.

Alain It makes no difference.

Hiatus.

Véronique Terrible stink of Kouros! . . .

Michel Ghastly.

Alain You certainly laid it on.

Annette I'm sorry.

Véronique Not your fault. I was the one spraying like a lunatic . . . Anyway, why can't we take things more lightly, why does everything always have to be so exhausting? . . .

Alain You think too much. Women think too much.

Annette There's an original remark, I bet that's thrown you for a loop.

Véronique 'Think too much', I don't know what that means. And I don't see the point of existence without some kind of moral conception of the world.

Michel See what I have to live with?

Véronique Shut up! Will you shut up?! I detest this pathetic complicity! You disgust me.

Michel Come on, have a sense of humour.

Véronique I don't have a sense of humour. And I have no intention of acquiring one.

Michel What I always say is, marriage: the most terrible ordeal God can inflict on you.

Annette Great.

Michel Marriage and children.

Annette There's no call for you to share your views with us, Michel. As a matter of fact, I find it slightly indecent.

Véronique That's not going to worry him.

Michel You mean you don't agree?

Annette These observations are irrelevant. Alain, say something.

Alain He's entitled to his opinions.

Annette Yes, but he doesn't have to broadcast them.

Alain Well, yes, perhaps . . .

Annette We don't give a damn about their marriage. We're here to settle a problem to do with our children, we don't give a damn about their marriage.

Alain Yes, but . . .

Annette But what? What do you mean?

Alain There's a connection.

Michel There's a connection! Of course there's a connection.

Véronique There's a connection between Bruno having his teeth broken and our marriage?!

Michel Obviously.

Annette We're not with you.

Michel Children consume and fracture our lives. Children drag us towards disaster, it's unavoidable. When you see those laughing couples casting off into the sea of matrimony, you say to yourself, they have no idea, poor things, they just have no idea, they're happy. No one tells you anything when you start out. I have an old school pal who's just about to have a child with his new girlfriend. I said to him, 'A child, at our age, are you insane?' The ten or a dozen good years left to us before we get cancer or a stroke, and you're going to bugger yourself up with some brat?

Annette You don't really believe what you're saying.

Véronique He does.

Michel Of course I believe it. Worse, even.

Véronique Yes.

Annette You're demeaning yourself, Michel.

Michel Is that right? Ha, ha!

Annette Stop crying, Véronique, you can see it only encourages him.

Michel (to Alain, who's refilling his empty glass) Help yourself, help yourself – exceptional, isn't it?

Alain Exceptional.


Michel Could I offer you a cigar? . . .

Véronique No, no cigars!

Alain Pity.

Annette You're not proposing to smoke a cigar, Alain!

Alain I shall do what I like, Annette, if I feel like accepting a cigar, I shall accept a cigar. If I'm not smoking, it's because I don't want to upset Véronique, who's



already completely lost it. She's right, stop snivelling, when a woman cries, a man is immediately provoked to the worst excesses. Added to which, Michel's point of view is, I'm sorry to say, entirely sound.

His mobile vibrates.

... Yes, Serge ... Go ahead ... Put Paris, the date ... and the exact time ...

Annette This is hideous!

Alain (*moving aside and muffling his voice to escape her fury*) ... Whatever time you send it. It has to look piping hot straight out of the oven ... No, not 'We're surprised'. 'We condemn'. 'Surprised' is feeble ...

Annette This goes on from morning to night, from morning to night he's glued to that mobile! That mobile makes mincemeat of our lives!

Alain Er ... Just a minute ...

He covers the mobile.

Annette, this is very important! ...

Annette It's always very important. Anything happening somewhere else is always more important.

Alain (*resuming*) Go ahead ... Yes ... Not 'procedure', 'manoeuvre'. 'A manoeuvre, timed for two weeks before the annual accounts,' etc. ...

Annette In the street, at dinner, he doesn't care where ...

Alain A 'paper' in inverted commas! Put the word 'paper' in inverted commas ...

Annette I'm not saying another word. Total surrender. I want to be sick again.

Michel Where's the basin?

Véronique I don't know.

Alain ... You just have to quote me: 'This is simply a disgraceful attempt to manipulate share prices ...'

Véronique Here it is. Go on, off you go.

Michel Ronnie ...

Véronique Everything's all right. We're fully equipped.

Alain '... share prices and to undermine my client,' confirms Maître Reille, counsel for the Verenz-Pharma company' ... AP, Reuters, general press, specialised press, Uncle Tom Cobley and all ...

He hangs up.

Véronique She wants to throw up again.

Alain What's the matter with you?

Annette I'm touched by your concern.

Alain It's upsetting me!

Annette I am sorry. I must have misunderstood.

Alain Oh, Annette, please! Don't let us start now! Just because they're quarrelling, just because their marriage is fucked, doesn't mean we have to compete!

Véronique What right do you have to say our marriage is fucked? Who gave you permission?

Alain's mobile vibrates.

Alain ... They just read it to me. We're sending it to you, Maurice ... 'Manipulation', 'manipulate share prices.' It's on its way.

He hangs up.

... Wasn't me who said it, it was François.

to be a good citizen of the planet – our son did well to clout yours, and I wipe my arse with your charter of human rights!

Michel A mouthful of grog and, bam, the real face appears.

Véronique I told you! Didn't I tell you?

Alain What did you tell him?

Véronique That she was a phoney. This woman is a phoney. I'm sorry.

Annette (*upset*) Ha, ha, ha! . . .

Alain When did you tell him?

Véronique When you were in the bathroom.

Alain You'd known her for fifteen minutes but you could tell she was a phoney.

Véronique It's the kind of thing I pick up on right away.

Michel It's true.

Véronique I have an instinct for that kind of thing.

Alain And 'phoney', what does that mean?

Annette I don't want to hear any more! Why are you putting me through this, Alain?

Alain Calm down, Woof-woof.

Véronique She's someone who tries to round off corners. Full stop. She's all front. She doesn't care any more than you do.

Michel It's true.

Alain It's true.

Véronique 'It's true'! Are you saying it's true?

F Michel They don't give a fuck! They haven't given a fuck since the start, it's obvious! Her too, you're right!

Alain And you do, I suppose? (*To Annette.*) Let me say something, love. (*To Michel.*) Explain to me in what way you care, Michel. What does the word mean in the first place? You're far more authentic when you're showing yourself in a horrible light. To tell the truth, no one in this room cares, except for Véronique, whose integrity, it has to be said, must be acknowledged.

Véronique Don't acknowledge me! Don't acknowledge me!

Annette I care. I absolutely care.

Alain We only care about our own feelings, Annette, we're not social crusaders, (*To Véronique.*) I saw your friend Jane Fonda on TV the other day, I was inches away from buying a Ku Klux Klan poster . . .

Véronique What do you mean, 'my friend'? What's Jane Fonda got to do with all this? . . .

Alain You're the same breed. You're part of the same category of woman – committed, problem-solving. That's not what we like about women, what we like about women is sensuality, wildness, hormones. Women who make a song and dance about their intuition, women who are custodians of the world depress us – even him, poor Michel, your husband, he's depressed . . .

Michel Don't speak for me!

Véronique Who gives a flying fuck what you like about women? Where does this lecture come from? A man like you, who could begin to give a fuck for your opinion?

Alain She's yelling. She's a regimental sergeant major.

Véronique What about her, doesn't she yell?! When she said that little bastard had done well to clout our son?

Annette Yes, he did do well! At least he's not a snivelling little poof!

Véronique Yours is a grass, is that any better?

Annette Alain, let's go! What are we doing, staying in this dump?

She makes to leave, then returns towards the tulips which she lashes out at violently. Flowers fly, disintegrate and scatter all over the place.

There, there, that's what I think of your pathetic flowers, your hideous tulips! . . . Ha, ha, ha! (*She bursts into tears.*) . . . It's the worst day of my life as well.

Silence.

A long stunned pause.

Michel picks something up off the floor.

Michel (to Annette) This yours?

Annette takes a spectacle case, opens it and takes out a pair of glasses.

Annette Thanks . . .

Michel Not broken? . . .

Annette No . . .

Hiatus.

Michel What I always say is . . .

Alain starts gathering up the stems and petals.

Leave it.

Alain No . . .

The telephone rings. After some hesitation, Véronique picks up the receiver.

Véronique Yes, darling . . . Oh, good . . . Will you be able to do your homework at Annabelle's? . . . No, no, darling, we haven't found her . . . Yes, I went all the way to the supermarket. But you know, my love, Nibbles is very resourceful, I think you have to have faith in her. You think she was happy in a cage? . . . Daddy's very sad, he didn't mean to upset you . . . Of course you will. Yes, of course you'll speak to him again. Listen, darling, we're worried enough already about your brother . . . She'll eat . . . she'll eat leaves . . . acorns, conkers . . . she'll find things, she knows what food she needs . . . Worms, snails, stuff that drops out of rubbish bins, she's like us, she's omnivorous . . . See you soon, sweetheart.

Hiatus.

Michel I dare say that creature's stuffing its face as we speak.

Véronique No.

Silence.

Michel What do we know?