1 VERONICA, MICHAEL, ALAN & ANNETTE

# GOD OF CARNAGE

*The Novaks and the Raleighs, sitting down, facing one another. We need to sense right away that the place belongs to the Novaks and that the two couples have just met. In the center, a coffee table, covered with art books. Two big bunches of tulips in vases. The prevailing mood is serious, friendly and tolerant.*

VERONICA. So, this is our statement … You'll be doing your own, of course … At 5:30 P.M. on the third of November, in Cobble Hill Park, following a verbal altercation, Benjamin Raleigh, eleven, armed with a stick, struck our son Henry Novak 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.
ALAN. Armed?
VERONICA. Armed? You don't like armed, what shall we say, Michael, furnished, equipped, furnished with a stick, is that all right?
ALAN. Furnished, yes.
MICHAEL. Furnished with a stick.
VERONICA. *(Making the correction.)* Furnished. The irony is, we've always regarded Cobble Hill Park as a haven of security, unlike Whitman Park.
MICHAEL. She's right. We've always said, Cobble Hill Park yes, Whitman Park no.
VERONICA. 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.
VERONICA. I don't see that any thanks are necessary. Fortunately, there is still such a thing as the art of co-existence, isn't there?
ALAN. 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? …
VERONICA. We don't know yet. They're being cautious about the prognosis. Apparently the nerve hasn't been totally exposed.
MICHAEL. Only a little bit of it's been exposed.
VERONICA. 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.
MICHAEL. They're trying to give the tooth a chance.
VERONICA. Obviously it would be best to avoid endodontic surgery.
ANNETTE. Well, yes …
VERONICA. So there'll be an interim period while they give the nerve a chance to recover.
MICHAEL. In the meantime, they'll be giving him ceramic crowns.
VERONICA. Whatever happens, you can't have an implant before you're eighteen.
MICHAEL. No.
VERONICA. Permanent implants can't be fitted until you finish growing.
ANNETTE. Of course. I hope … I hope it all works out.
VERONICA. Yes, I hope so. *(Slight pause.)*
ANNETTE. Those tulips are gorgeous.
VERONICA. They're from that little Korean deli up on Smith Street. You know, the one at the end.
ANNETTE. Oh, yes.
VERONICA. They come every morning direct from Holland, forty dollars for a bunch of fifty.
ANNETTE. Oh, really!
VERONICA. You know, the one at the end.
ANNETTE. Yes, yes.
VERONICA. You know he didn't want to identify Benjamin.
MICHAEL. No, he didn't.
VERONICA. Impressive sight, that child, face bashed in, teeth missing, still refusing to talk.
ANNETTE. I can imagine.
MICHAEL. He also didn't want to identify him for fear of looking like a tattletale in front of his friends, we have to be honest, Veronica, it was nothing more than bravado.
VERONICA. 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 manage to get Benjamin's name? …
VERONICA. Well, we explained to Henry he wasn't helping this child by shielding him.
MICHAEL. We said to him if this child thinks he can keep on hitting people with impunity, why should he stop?
VERONICA. We said to him if we were this kid's parents, we would definitely want to be told.
ANNETTE. Absolutely.
ALAN. Yes … *(His cell phone vibrates.)* Excuse me … *(He moves away from the group; as he talks, he pulls a newspaper out of his pocket.)* Yes, Murray, thanks for calling back. Right, in today's *Times*, let me read it to you … According to a paper published in the *Lancet* and taken up yesterday in the *Financial Times*, two Australian researchers have revealed the neurological side effects of Antril, 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 goddamn inconvenient … No, what's most inconvenient about it as far as I'm concerned is the annual shareholders' meeting's 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 this clafouti. Good clafouti is an endangered species.