

## AUDITION PIECE ONE

**MICHEL VALLON** (Michael Novak)  
**VERONIQUE VALLON** (Veronica Novak)  
**ALAIN REILLE** (Alan Raleigh)  
**ANNETTE REILLE** (Annette Raleigh)

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 centre, 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 pounds 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 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 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 pavement. 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 anymore.

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.

ANNETTE. You're right.

ALAN. What is it you sell?

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

ALAN. Money in that, is there?

MICHAEL. Well, you know, it's never exactly been a bonanza, it was pretty hard when we started. But if I'm out there every day pushing my product, we survive. At least it's not seasonal, like textiles. Although we do sell a lot of fondue pots around Christmastime!

ALAN. I'm sure . . .

ANNETTE. When you saw the hamster sitting there, paralyzed, why didn't you bring it back home?

MICHAEL. Because I couldn't pick it up.

## AUDITION PIECE TWO

### [ALAN – TALKING ON HIS MOBILE PHONE]

ALAN. . . . Absolutely not ... the shareholders won't give a fuck . . . remind him, the shareholder is king . . . (Annette launches herself at Alan, snatches the mobile phone and, after a brief look around to see where she can put it, shoves it into the vase of tulips) Annette, what the...!

ANNETTE. So there.

VERONICA. Ha, ha! Well done!

MICHAEL. (Horrified) Oh, my God!

ALAN. Are you completely insane? Fuck!!! (He rushes towards the vase, but Michael, who has got in ahead of him, fishes out the dripping object)

MICHAEL. The hair dryer! Where's the hair dryer? (He finds it and turns it on at once, directing it towards the mobile phone.)

ALAN. You need to be locked up, you poor thing! This is incomprehensible! ... I had everything in there! It's brand new, it took me hours to set up!

MICHAEL. {To Annette; above the infernal din of the hair dryer.) Really, I don't understand you. That was completely irresponsible.

ALAN. Everything's in there, my whole life . . .

ANNETTE. His whole life!

MICHAEL. {Still fighting the noise.) Hang on, we might be able to fix it . . .

ALAN. Forget it! It's fucked! . . .

MICHAEL. We'll take out the battery and the SIM card. Can you open it? {Alan tries to open it with no conviction.)

ALAN. I don't know how, I just got it.

MICHAEL. Give it to me.

ALAN. It's fucked . . . And they think it's funny, they think it's funny'

MICHAEL. {Opening it easily.) There we are. {He goes back on the

offensive with the hair dryer, having laid out the various parts.) You, Veronica, you at least could have the manners not to laugh at this!

VERONICA. {Laughing heartily.} My husband will have spent his entire afternoon blow-drying!

ANNETTE. Ha, ha, ha! {Annette makes no bones about helping herself to more rum. Michael, immune to finding any of this amusing, keeps busy, concentrating intently. For a moment, there's only the sound of the hair dryer. Alan has slumped.}

ALAN. Leave it, pal. Leave it. There's nothing you can do. {Michael finally switches off the hair dryer.}

MICHAEL. We'll have to wait a minute . . . {Pause.} You want to use our phone? {Alan gestures that he doesn't and that he couldn't care less.} I have to say . . .

ANNETTE. Yes, what is it you have to say, Michael?

MICHAEL. No ... I really can't think what to say.

ANNETTE. Well, if you ask me, everyone's feeling fine. If you ask me, everyone's feeling better. {Pause.} . . . Everyone's much calmer, don't you think? . . . Men are so wedded to their gadgets ... It belittles them ...It takes away all their authority ... A man needs to keep his hands free ... if you ask me. Even an attache case is enough to put me off. There was a man, once, I found really attractive, then I saw him with a square shoulder-bag, a man's shoulder -bag, but that was it. There's nothing worse than a shoulder bag. Although there's also nothing worse than a mobile phone. A man ought to give the impression that he's alone . . . if you ask me. I mean, that he's capable of being alone . . . ! I also have a John Wayne-ish idea of virility. And what was it he had? A Colt .45. A device for creating a vacuum ... A man who can't give the impression that he's a loner has no texture ... So, Michael, are you happy? Is it somewhat fractured, our little . . . What was it you said? . . . I've forgotten the word, . . . but in the end . . . everyone's feeling more or less all right ... if you ask me.

MICHAEL. I should probably warn you, rum drives you crazy.

ANNETTE. I've never felt more normal.

MICHAEL. Right.

ANNETTE. I'm starting to feel rather pleasantly serene. VERONICA. Ha, ha! That's wonderful! . . . Rather pleasantly serene.

MICHAEL. As for you, Darjeeling, I don't see what's to be gained by getting publicly smashed.

VERONICA. Kiss my ass. (Michael goes to fetch the cigar box.)

MICHAEL. Take one, Alan. Relax.

VERONICA. Cigars are not smoked in this house!

MICHAEL. These are Cuban, Cohiba, Monte Cristo number three and number four.

VERONICA. You don't smoke in a house with an asthmatic child!

ANNETTE. Who's asthmatic?

VERONICA. Our son.

MICHAEL. Didn't stop you buying a fucking hamster.

ANNETTE. It's true, if somebody has asthma, keeping animals isn't recommended.

MICHAEL. Completely unrecommended!

ANNETTE. Even a goldfish can be risky.

VERONICA. Do I have to listen to this fatuous nonsense? (She snatches the cigar box out of Michael's hands and slams it shut brutally) I'm sorry, no doubt I'm the only one of us not feeling rather pleasantly serene. In fact, I've never been so unhappy. I think this is the unhappiest day of my life.

MICHAEL. Drinking always makes you unhappy.

VERONICA. Michael, every word that comes out of your mouth is destroying me. I don't drink. I drank a mouthful of this shitty rum you're waving about as if you were showing the congregation the Shroud of Turin, I don't drink and I bitterly regret it, it'd be a relief to be able to take refuge in a little drop at every minor setback.

ANNETTE. My husband's unhappy as well. Look at him. Slumped. He looks as if someone's left him by the side of the road. I think it's the unhappiest day of his life too.

ALAN. Yes.

ANNETTE. I'm so sorry, Woof-woof. (Michael starts up the hair dryer again, directing it at the various parts of the mobile phone.)

VERONICA. Will you turn off the blow-dryer! That thing is toast. {The telephone rings.}

MICHAEL. Yes! Because it could kill you! That medication is poison! Someone's going to explain it to you . . . {He hands the receiver to

Alan.) Tell her.

ALAN. Tell her what? . . .

MICHAEL. Everything you know about that crap you're peddling.

ALAN. . . . How are you, ma'am? . . .

ANNETTE. What can he tell her? He doesn't know the first thing about it!

ALAN. . . . Yes . . . And does it hurt? ... Of course. Well, the operation will fix that. . . . And the other leg, I see. No, no, I'm not an orthopaedic surgeon . . . {Aside.) She keeps calling me "doctor" ...

ANNETTE. Doctor, this is grotesque, hang up!

ALAN. But you ... I mean to say, you're not having any problems with your balance? . . . Oh, no. Not at all. Not at all. Don't listen to any of that. All the same, it'd probably be a good idea to stop taking it for the time being. Until . . . until you've had a chance to get comfortably through your operation . . . Yes, you sound as if you're in very good shape . . . (Michael snatches the receiver from him.)

MICHAEL. All right, Mum, is that clear, stop taking the medication, why do you always have to argue, stop taking it, do what you're told, I'll call you back . . . Lots of love, love from us all. {He 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 arse 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. Wrong 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 paracetamol 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 the 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 mobile 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 letting them call my son an executioner? You come to their house to settle things and you get insulted and bullied and lectured on how to be a good citizen of the planet. Our son did well to clout yours and I wipe my arse with your bill of rights!

MICHAEL. A mouthful of rum and bam, the real face appears.

VERONICA. I told you! Didn't I tell you?

ALAN. What did you tell him?

VERONICA. That she was a phony. This woman is a phony. I'm sorry.

ANNETTE. (Upset.) Ha, ha, ha!

ALAN. When did you tell him?

VERONICA. When you were in the bathroom.

ALAN. You'd known her for fifteen minutes, but you could tell she was a phony.

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

MICHAEL. It's true.

VERONICA. I have an instinct for that kind of thing.

ALAN. And phony, what does that mean?

ANNETTE. I don't want to hear any more! Why are you putting me through this, Alan?

ALAN. Calm down, Woof-woof.

VERONICA. She's someone who tries to smooth the rough edges. Period. She doesn't care anymore than you do. She's all front.

MICHAEL. It's true.

ALAN. It's true.

VERONICA. It's true! Are you saying it's true?

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

ALAN. And you do, I suppose? (To Annette.) Let me say something, honey. Explain to me in what way you care, Michael. 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 you the truth, no one in this room cares, except for Veronica, whose integrity, it has to be said, must be acknowledged.

VERONICA. Don't acknowledge me! Don't acknowledge me!

ANNETTE. I care. I absolutely care.

ALAN. We only care about our own feelings, Annette, we're not social crusaders. (To Veronica.) I saw your friend Jane Fonda on TV the other day, I was inches away from joining the KKK . . .

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

ALAN. 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 Michael, your husband, he's depressed . . .

MICHAEL. Don't speak for me!

VERONICA. 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?

ALAN. She's yelling. She's yelling like a stuck pig.

VERONICA. 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 faggot!

VERONICA. Yours is a snitch, is that any better?

ANNETTE. Alan, 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 hursts into tears.) . . . It's the worst day of my life as well. {Silence. A long stunned pause.