

# ALAN SIDE

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 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 goddamn inconvenient ... No, what's most inconvenient about it as far as I'm concerned is the annual 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?

START

END



# MICHAEL SIDE START

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.

END

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.

ANNETTE. You put it on the sidewalk.

MICHAEL. I took it out in its cage and sort of tipped it out. I don't like to touch rodents. *(Veronica comes back with a tray. Drinks and the clafouti.)*

VERONICA. I don't know who put the clafouti in the fridge. Monica puts everything in the fridge, she won't be told. What's Benjamin said to you? Sugar?

ALAN. No, thanks. What's in the clafouti?

VERONICA. Apples and pears.

ANNETTE. Apples and pears?

VERONICA. My own little recipe. *(She cuts the clafouti and distributes slices.)* It's going to be too cold, it's a shame.

ANNETTE. Apples and pears, this is a first.

VERONICA. Apples and pears, it's pretty textbook, but there's a little trick to it.

ANNETTE. There is?

VERONICA. Pears need to be cut thicker than apples. Because pears cook faster than apples.

ANNETTE. Ah, of course.

MICHAEL. But wait, she's not telling you the real secret.

VERONICA. Let them try it.

ALAN. Very good. It's very good.

ANNETTE. Tasty.

VERONICA. ... Gingerbread crumbs!

ANNETTE. Brilliant!

VERONICA. To be quite honest, I got it from his mother.

ALAN. Gingerbread, delicious ... Well, at least all this has given



# VERONICA SIDE

ANNETTE. Didn't you have to go?

ALAN. I could manage a small glass, now that we've come this far.  
(*Michael pours a glass for Alan.*)

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

ANNETTE. Calm down, Veronica, calm down, this is pointless ...

VERONICA. Who stopped anyone touching the clafouti this morning? Who said, let's keep the rest of the clafouti for the Raleighs?! Who said it?!

ALAN. That was nice.

MICHAEL. What's that got to do with it?

VERONICA. What do you mean, what's that got to do with it?

MICHAEL. If you invite people, you invite people.

VERONICA. You're a liar, you're a liar! He's a liar!

ALAN. You know, speaking personally, my wife had to drag me here. When you're brought up with a kind of John Wayne-ish idea of virility, you don't want to settle this kind of problem with a lot of yakking. (*Michael laughs.*)

ANNETTE. I thought your model was Spartacus.

ALAN. Same family.

MICHAEL. Analogous.

VERONICA. Analogous! Are there no lengths you won't go to to humiliate yourself, Michael?

ANNETTE. Obviously it was pointless dragging him here.

ALAN. What were you hoping for, Woof-woof? It's true, it's a ludicrous nickname. Were you hoping for a glimpse of universal harmony? This rum is terrific.

MICHAEL. It is, isn't it? English Harbor, ten years old, direct from Antigua.

VERONICA. And the tulips, whose idea was that? I said it's a shame the tulips are finished, I didn't say rush down to the Korean deli at the crack of dawn.

ANNETTE. Don't work yourself up into this state, Veronica, it's crazy.

VERONICA. The tulips were his idea! Entirely his idea! Aren't we allowed a drink?

ANNETTE. Yes, Veronica and I would like one too. By the way, it's pretty amusing, someone descended from Spartacus and John Wayne who can't even pick up a mouse.

MICHAEL. Will you SHUT UP about that hamster! Shut up! ...

(*He gives Annette a glass of rum.*)

VERONICA. Ha, ha! You're right, it's laughable!

ANNETTE. What about her?

MICHAEL. I don't think she needs any.

VERONICA. Give me a drink, Michael.

MICHAEL. No.

VERONICA. Michael!

MICHAEL. No. (*Veronica tries to snatch the bottle out of his hands. Michael resists.*)

ANNETTE. What's the matter with you, Michael?!

MICHAEL. All right, there you are, take it. Drink, drink, who cares?

ANNETTE. Is alcohol bad for you?

VERONICA. It's wonderful. (*She slumps.*)

ALAN. Right ... Well, I don't know ...

VERONICA. (*To Alan.*) ... Listen, Mr. Raleigh ...

ANNETTE. Alan.

VERONICA. Alan, we're not exactly soulmates, 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 ...

MICHAEL. He doesn't give a shit. He doesn't give a shit about any of that.

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

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

VERONICA. I'll talk to whoever I goddamn well please! (*The telephone rings.*)

MICHAEL. Who the fuck is this now? ... Yes, Mom ... 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. Mom, I'm busy, I'll call you back.

ANNETTE. He's still in pain?

VERONICA. No.

ANNETTE. Then why worry your mother?

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

MICHAEL. Right, that's enough, Veronica! What is with this psychodrama?

ALAN. Veronica, 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



# ANNETTE SIDE

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 attaché 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 cell 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? It is 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.

START

END