

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!

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?

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

MICHAEL. Fuck the hamster!

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

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

ALAN. Hundred per cent behind you there.

VERONICA. Pathetic.

MICHAEL. Careful, Veronica, 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 Henry?

MICHAEL. What about Henry?

ANNETTE. Isn't he upset?

MICHAEL. If you remember, Henry has other problems.

VERONICA. Henry was less attached to Nibbles.

MICHAEL. Stupid name as well!

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

MICHAEL. Let me tell you something, I'm up to here with these idiotic discussions. We tried to be nice, we bought tulips, my wife passed me off as a liberal, but I can't keep this bullshit up any more. I am not a member of polite society. What I am and always have been, is a fucking Neanderthal.

ALAN. Aren't we all?

VERONICA. No. No. I'm sorry, we are not all fucking Neanderthals.

ALAN. Well, not you, obviously.

VERONICA. No, not me, thank God.

MICHAEL. Not you, Darjee, not you, you're a fully evolved woman, you're stain-resistant.

VERONICA. Why are you attacking me?

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

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

MICHAEL. You organized this little shindig, I just let myself be recruited ...

VERONICA. You let yourself be recruited?

MICHAEL. Yes.

VERONICA. That's detestable.

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

VERONICA. Exactly, I'm standing up for civilization! And it's lucky there are people who are prepared to do that! (*She's on the brink of tears.*) You think it's a better idea to be a fucking Neanderthal?

ALAN. Come on now, come on . . .

VERONICA. (*As above.*) Is it normal to criticize someone for not being a fucking Neanderthal? ...

ANNETTE. No one's saying that. No one's criticizing you.

VERONICA. Yes, they are (*She bursts into tears.*)

ALAN. No, they're not!

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

MICHAEL. Stop it, Ronnie . . .

VERONICA. Stop what? ...

MICHAEL. You're blowing things out of proportion ...

VERONICA. I don't give a shit! You force yourself to rise above petty-mindedness . . . and you finish up humiliated and completely on your own . . . (*Alan's cell phone has vibrated.*)

ALAN. . . . Yes . . . Let them prove it! . . . Prove it . . . but if you ask me, don't answer at all . . .

MICHAEL. We're always on our own! Everywhere! Who wants a little rum?

ALAN. . . . Murray, I'm in a meeting, I'll call you back from the office . . . (*He cuts the line.*)

VERONICA. So, you see! I'm living with someone who's totally negative.

ALAN. Who's negative?

MICHAEL. I am.

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

MICHAEL. I told you.

VERONICA. You told me?

MICHAEL. Yes.

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

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

ANNETTE. It was a good idea . . .

MICHAEL. Oh, please! ... (*He raises the bottle of rum.*) Anybody?

VERONICA. You told me it wasn't a good idea, Michael?!

MICHAEL. Think so.

VERONICA. You think so!

ALAN. Wouldn't mind a little drop.

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.