

GOD OF CARNAGE

March 5, 2010

1 EXT. PLAYGROUND IN PARK SLOPE - DAY 1

WIDE ANGLE VIEW: A playground in Brooklyn. A winter sun shines brightly. Stark trees and patchy grass.

A boy of about 10 years stands apart from a group of kids his age.

In his hand he is holding a large piece of tree branch, twirling it absently, with the thick end out, for his own amusement.

Another boy, with the support of the group, starts shouting abuse at him. Though the words aren't audible, it's clear that things are getting tense.

A verbal exchange is followed by some threatening gestures on both sides. One boy shoves, the other shoves back.

It's all pretty unremarkable until the first boy, practically reflexively, strikes the second with the branch.

The wounded child is doubled over, his face in his hands. The others crowd around him.

The boy who hit him also starts to take a step toward the group of children. He seems distraught.

2 INT. LONGSTREET APARTMENT - DEN - DAY 2

A narrow room converted to a home office. Winter light filters through the only window.

On a table against one wall there are some periodicals - topical magazines about contemporary history and UNESCO publications. There are also some assorted papers, a school notebook, a few baubles and a laptop computer.

PENELOPE LONGSTREET is seated at the computer.

Her husband, MICHAEL, is standing by amiably, leaning over and already prepared for the words which are to follow.

Also standing there, but a couple of steps back, are ALAN and NANCY COWAN. They are dressed in business clothes. She must have put her coat down somewhere, he has his on his arm. They both stare at the screen.

It is clear from the start that these two couples are not close. The prevailing mood is serious, cordial and tolerant.

PENELOPE reads out loud the words written on the screen:

PENELOPE

"January 11, at 5:30 PM..."
 (with a glance behind
 her toward the
 COWANS:)

You'll make your statement
 separately, this is ours.
 "...following a verbal dispute in the
 Third Street Playground, Zachary
 Cowan, age eleven and armed with a
 stick, struck our son, Ethan
 Longstreet, in the face. In addition
 to the swelling and bruising of
 Ethan's upper lip, this act also
 resulted in two broken incisors,
 including nerve damage to the right
 incisor."

ALAN

Armed?

PENELOPE

Armed? You don't like armed? Michael,
 what could we say? Carrying? Holding?
 Carrying a stick, is that all right?

ALAN

Carrying, yeah.

MICHAEL

Carrying a stick.

PENELOPE enters the correction on the laptop.

PENELOPE

Carrying.

She prints the single page and hands it to NANCY COWAN.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

It's ironic, we always thought the
 Third Street Playground was safe.
 Compared to the Park.

MICHAEL

True.

Once the paper is in his wife's hand, ALAN COWAN tries to
 cut the meeting short, starts backing up toward the foyer.

They continue talking as all make their way progressively
 toward the front door.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

We always said, Third Street playground, fine. Prospect Park, no way.

PENELOPE

Only goes to show. But hey, thank you for coming. It's so much better than getting caught up in that adversarial mindset.

NANCY

Well we thank you. Really.

PENELOPE

I don't think we have to thank each other. Fortunately, some of us still have a sense of community, right?

ALAN

Though the kids haven't got that notion straight yet. I mean our kid.

NANCY

Right, our kid!

The LONGSTREETS deftly lead the COWANS into the living room.

3

INT. LONGSTREET LIVING ROOM - DAY

3

The LONGSTREET's living room is modest and homey. There's a partial view of the elevated subway. The furnishings are improvised and disparate, with a few ethnic touches. There is a large bookshelf.

A few chairs and a sofa are arranged around a coffee table, covered with art books.

There is a large bouquet of tulips in a transparent vase.

The LONGSTREETS sit down and NANCY follows their lead. ALAN remains standing.

NANCY

What about the tooth with the damaged nerve?

PENELOPE

Oh, they don't know. There's still some question about the prognosis. Apparently, the nerve is not completely exposed.

MICHAEL

Only part of it is exposed.

PENELOPE

Right. There's a part that's exposed and a part that's still protected. So for right now, they're not going to devitalize it.

MICHAEL

They want to give the tooth a chance.

PENELOPE

We would so like to avoid root canal.

NANCY

Of course.

PENELOPE

So there's an observation period while they give the nerve a chance to heal.

MICHAEL

Meantime, he's going to need caps.

PENELOPE

You can't have implants until you're eighteen anyway.

MICHAEL

You can't.

PENELOPE

The permanent implants can only be done once you reach maturity.

NANCY

Naturally. I hope... I hope it all turns out all right.

PENELOPE

We can only hope.

A slightly uncomfortable beat.

NANCY

Those tulips are gorgeous.

PENELOPE

It's that little florist way up by Sullivan. You know? The one all the way up.

NANCY

Oh right.

PENELOPE

They fly the bulbs in straight from Holland, twenty dollars a load of fifty.

NANCY

That a fact?

PENELOPE

You know the one? All the way up.

NANCY

Right, right.

PENELOPE

You know, he didn't want to tell on Zachary.

MICHAEL

No, he didn't want to.

PENELOPE

It was incredible to see. This child with no face left, no teeth, and he just wouldn't talk.

NANCY

I can just imagine.

MICHAEL

He didn't want to tell on the kid. Like his friends would say he was a snitch. I mean let's face it, Penelope, it wasn't only valor.

PENELOPE

You might say that. But valor itself requires a social context.

NANCY

Naturally. So how did you..? I mean, how did you finally get Zachary's name?

PENELOPE

Well because we explained to Ethan that protecting this child was not going to help him.

MICHAEL

We told him, if this kid thinks he can go on hitting people and getting away with it, why should he stop?

PENELOPE

We told him that if we were that child's parents, we would absolutely want to know about this.

NANCY

Of course.

ALAN

Yeah.

ALAN's cell phone vibrates. He quickly pulls it out of his jacket pocket.

ALAN (CONT'D)

Excuse me one second.

ALAN walks away from the others. While he speaks, he takes a newspaper out of the pocket of his overcoat.

ALAN (CONT'D)

Yes Gary, thanks for getting back to me. So it's in this morning's Journal. I'll read it to you. "According to a study published by British journal Lancet, two Australian researchers have identified secondary neurological effects of TW Pharma's anti-hypertension medication Antril, including impaired hearing and muscle coordination." Who the hell does your press monitoring over there?

(beat)

Yeah, you're in deep shit.

(beat)

No, my problem is the A.S.M. You have an Annual Stockholders Meeting in two weeks. Did you schedule a contingency for this?

(beat)

OK. And Gary, Gary... Talk to PR and find out if it was picked up anywhere else. And call me back.

(hangs up:)

Sorry.

MICHAEL

So you're like a...

ALAN

An attorney.

NANCY

And yourself?

MICHAEL

Houseware supply. Penelope is a writer and she works part time in a bookstore, mostly art books and history books.

NANCY

A writer?

PENELOPE

I co-wrote a volume about Sabeian civilization, working from artifacts recovered when they resumed digs after the Ethiopia-Eritrea conflict. And now I have a book coming out in January about the Darfur tragedy.

NANCY

So you specialize in Africa.

PENELOPE

I'm interested in that part of the world.

NANCY

Do you have any other children?

PENELOPE

Ethan's sister Courtney is nine. She's very angry at her father right now. He got rid of the hamster last night.

NANCY

You got rid of the hamster?

MICHAEL

Yeah. Made such a racket at night. Those things sleep during the day. Ethan was going crazy. He couldn't stand the racket that hamster made. Now I don't mind telling you, I been wanting to get rid of the thing for the longest time. So I thought, that's it. I took it out and left it in the street. I figured it was a gutter-sewer kind of animal, but no. It was scared out of its wits out there on that sidewalk. Truth is, they're not pets and they're not wild. I don't know where they belong. Drop them in a clearing in the woods, they're still not happy. I mean where are you supposed to put them?

NANCY

You just left him outside?

PENELOPE

He did, and then he tried to convince Courtney that the hamster ran away. Of course, she wasn't buying it.

ALAN

And this morning the hamster was gone?

MICHAEL

Gone.

PENELOPE

And you? What kind of work do you do?

NANCY

I'm an investment counselor.

PENELOPE

Would it be possible -- and I'll just come out and ask you directly --for Zachary to apologize to Ethan?

ALAN

It would be good if they talked.

NANCY

He's got to apologize, Alan. He has to actually say he's sorry.

ALAN

Yeah, I mean sure, probably.

PENELOPE

Well is he sorry?

ALAN

He knows what he did. He didn't realize how serious it was. He's eleven years old.

PENELOPE

Eleven is not a baby.

MICHAEL

It's not an adult either. We didn't ask you, you want some coffee or tea? Is there any cobbler left, Penny? She makes a mean cobbler!

ALAN

If you got espresso, I don't mind a cup.

NANCY

A glass of water.

MICHAEL

(to PENELOPE:)

Espresso for me too, babe. And bring the cobbler.

PENELOPE leaves the room. After a short beat:

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

You got to taste this cobbler.

MICHAEL suddenly rises, follows PENELOPE out.

4 INT. KITCHEN - DAY

4

In the LONGSTREET kitchen, PENELOPE is busy at the espresso machine. MICHAEL enters.

MICHAEL
Where's the cobbler?

They look around the room. Then PENELOPE opens the refrigerator and takes a cake dish out.

PENELOPE
She put the cobbler in the fridge again! I don't know what language I should speak to her in.

MICHAEL takes out some plates and spoons.

MICHAEL
They're nice, right?

PENELOPE
Do you need to tell everyone I'm a writer?

MICHAEL sets out a tray, including the cobbler.

MICHAEL
You are a writer. You wrote a book.

5 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

5

In the living room, the COWAN's have changed positions: NANCY is sitting in another seat, as if she had gotten up to look at something in the meantime. ALAN is now seated as well.

NANCY
A very nice couple, admit it.

ALAN
Very.

MICHAEL comes back with the tray.

MICHAEL
A good cobbler isn't easy to make.

NANCY
True.

MICHAEL sets the tray on the coffee table. During the following dialog, he carves out portions on the plates and hands them to his guests.

ALAN

What do you sell?

MICHAEL

Decorative hardware. Door locks, handles, copper fittings. And kitchen equipment, pots and pans...

ALAN

That a good living?

MICHAEL

You know, it's not like we had any banner years or anything. It was tough starting out. But long as I'm out there every morning, with my catalog and my sample case, it's a living. Although the cast iron roasting pans do pick up around the holidays!

ALAN

Yeah.

NANCY

When you saw the hamster was terrified, why didn't you bring it home?

MICHAEL

Cause I don't touch them.

NANCY

You put it on the sidewalk.

PENELOPE returns with the coffee.

MICHAEL

It was in the cage. I flipped it over. No way I'm touching those creatures.

PENELOPE

(to ALAN:)

Sugar?

ALAN

No, no sugar. What kind of cobbler you make?

PENELOPE

Apple and pear.

NANCY

Apple and pear?

PENELOPE
My own little recipe.
(giggles:)
It's too cold. Shame.

NANCY
Apple and pear, that's new to me.

PENELOPE
Apple and pear is a classic. But
there is a trick to it.

NANCY
Really?

PENELOPE
You have to cut the pear thicker than
the apple, because the pear cooks
faster.

NANCY
Oh, right.

MICHAEL
She's not telling you the real
secret.

PENELOPE
Let them taste it.

ALAN
Very good. Very good.

NANCY
Delicious.

PENELOPE
Gingerbread crumbs!

NANCY
Oh my God.

PENELOPE
It's sort of a souped-up Marie
Callender recipe. To be honest, I got
the idea from his mother.

ALAN
Gingerbread, fantastic. At least we
get a new recipe out of this.

PENELOPE
I wish my son didn't have to lose two
teeth in the process.

ALAN
Of course, that's what I meant.

NANCY

You have a novel way of expressing it.

ALAN

No, hey. I....

His cell vibrates - he checks the display.

ALAN (CONT'D)

I have to take this... Yes, Gary.

(beat)

No. No letters to the editor. You'll just feed the flames.

(beat)

Was it scheduled?

(beat)

Uh-huh.

(beat)

What disorders are you talking about? What's ataxia?

(beat)

And in normal doses?

(beat)

How long have you known this?

(beat)

And in all that time you haven't recalled it?

(beat)

What are we talking about in revenues?

(beat)

Oh. Oh, I see.

(beat)

OK.

ALAN hangs up and immediately dials another number, all the while gobbling down his cobbler.

NANCY

Alan, we're all waiting for you.

ALAN

Yeah, right. One second.

(on cell:)

Dennis?

(beat)

They've known about the risks for two years.

(beat)

An internal report, but no undesirable side-effects are firmly established.

(beat)

No, no precautionary measures and they didn't schedule a reserve, nothing in the annual report.

(beat)

(MORE)

ALAN (CONT'D)

Unsteady walk, equilibrium problems.
Basically, you look like you're drunk
all the time.

ALAN and his assistant have a laugh. He stuffs himself with
cobbler, laughing and talking with his mouth full,
unabashed.

ALAN (CONT'D)

A hundred fifty million in revenues.

(beat)

Deny everything.

(beat)

That dumbshit wanted us to write a
letter to the editor. No way we're
writing a letter. On the other hand,
if we see this is getting picked up,
we could do a press release.
Somebody's spreading false rumors two
weeks out from the A.S.M. kind of
thing.

(beat)

He's calling me back.

(beat)

OK.

(hangs up)

I've been so busy, I hardly had time
for lunch.

MICHAEL

Help yourself, help yourself.

ALAN

Thanks. I know I'm pushing it. Where
were we?

PENELOPE

We were saying it would have been
better to meet some other way.

ALAN

Oh, right. Yeah. So this cobbler,
your mother, huh?

MICHAEL

It's my mother's recipe but Pen made
it.

PENELOPE

Your mother's doesn't mix pear and
apple!

MICHAEL

No.

PENELOPE

She has to have an operation, poor
thing.

NANCY

Yeah? What for?

PENELOPE

The knee.

MICHAEL

She's going to get a polyethylene and metallic prosthesis. She's wondering what's going to be left of it after the cremation.

PENELOPE

Don't be mean.

MICHAEL

She doesn't want to be buried with my father. She wants to be cremated, and put upstate next to her mother, who's all alone. A couple of urns jabbering away on the shores of Lake Sebago. Ha, ha!

Everyone laughs politely. Very discreetly, ALAN edges toward the exit.

NANCY

We're very touched by how generous you're being. We realize how you're trying to smooth things out here instead of making them worse.

PENELOPE

Please, it's the least we could do.

MICHAEL

Yeah!

NANCY

No, come on. So many parents just take their kids' side, acting like children themselves. If Ethan had broken two of Zachary's teeth, I'm thinking Alan and I might have had more of a knee-jerk reaction. I'm not sure we would see the big picture.

MICHAEL

Sure you would!

ALAN

She's right. I'm not so sure.

MICHAEL

You would. Because we all know it could have happened the other way around.

Beat. PENELOPE's disapproval of her husband's remark is silent, but clear.

PENELOPE

So what does Zachary say? How is he experiencing this?

NANCY

He doesn't talk much. A little overwhelmed I guess.

PENELOPE

He realizes that he disfigured his schoolmate?

ALAN

No. No, he doesn't realize that he disfigured his schoolmate.

NANCY

Why do you say that? Of course Zachary realizes!

ALAN

He realizes that this violent behavior is unacceptable. Not that he disfigured his schoolmate.

PENELOPE

You don't like the word but unfortunately the word is appropriate.

ALAN

My son did not disfigure your son.

PENELOPE

Your son disfigured our son. Come back after school hours, look at his mouth and teeth.

MICHAEL

Momentarily disfigured.

ALAN

His mouth will be fine when the swelling goes down. As for the teeth, if he needs it, we'd be willing to chip in for the best dental care...

MICHAEL

We got insurance for that. What we want is for the boys to patch it up, make sure nothing like this ever happens again.

NANCY

Let's set up a meeting.

MICHAEL

Yeah. Exactly.

PENELOPE

With us there?

ALAN

They don't need coaching. Let them work it out like men.

NANCY

Like men. Alan, don't be ridiculous. On the other hand, maybe we don't need to be there. Maybe it's better if we weren't there, right?

PENELOPE

The issue is not whether we should be there or not. The issue is, do they want to talk, do they want to clear this up?

MICHAEL

Ethan does.

PENELOPE

But Zachary?

NANCY

We won't give him a choice.

PENELOPE

It has to come from him.

NANCY

Zachary acts like a thug, we're not going to wait around for him to see the light.

PENELOPE

If Zachary sees Ethan in a punitive context, because he's forced to, I can't see anything positive coming out of that.

ALAN

Mrs. Longstreet, our son is a maniac. If you hope he'll suddenly and spontaneously get all apologetic, you're dreaming. Look I'm sorry, but I really do have to get back to the office.

ALAN forces the moment. "Time to go."

NANCY rises as well. Pretty soon, everyone is standing.

ALAN (CONT'D)

Nancy, you stay. You'll let me know what was decided. I'm no use to anyone anyway. Women think you need the man, you need the father, like it would do any good. The man is just baggage you drag around. He's out of step and clumsy. Oh you can see part of the el from here, cool!

NANCY

I'm really sorry, but I can't stay either. My husband has never been much of an I'll-push-the-stroller type daddy.

Everyone drifts toward the door.

PENELOPE

Pity. It's wonderful walking with a child. It goes by so fast. Michael, you really liked taking care of the kids, you had a ball pushing that stroller.

MICHAEL

Yeah, sure.

6

INT. FOYER - DAY

6

Everyone is in the foyer. PENELOPE hands NANCY her coat and she puts it on. ALAN has opened the door and is already at the doorstep when PENELOPE speaks:

PENELOPE

So what should we decide?

NANCY

Could you come over to our place at about seven-thirty, with Ethan?

PENELOPE

Seven-thirty? What do you think, Michael?

MICHAEL

Well, if you want my opinion...

NANCY

Yes, please.

MICHAEL

I think Zachary should be the one to come over.

PENELOPE

Yes, I agree.

MICHAEL

The victim shouldn't be the one who makes the trip.

PENELOPE

That's right.

ALAN already has one foot out on the landing.

ALAN

I can't be anywhere at seven-thirty.

NANCY

Who needs you? You're useless, right?

PENELOPE

Seriously, I think it's a good idea for his father to be there.

ALAN's cell vibrates again.

ALAN

(answering PENELOPE:)
All right but not tonight.
(on phone:)
Hello?

7

INT. LANDING AND ELEVATOR - DAY

7

His cell phone stuck to his ear, ALAN uses the moment to step out on the landing and ring for the elevator.

ALAN

Not a word in the annual report. But the risk wasn't officially established. There's no proof.

He hangs up.

NANCY is on the landing as well. PENELOPE and MICHAEL quickly amble down the hall toward the elevator.

PENELOPE

Tomorrow?

ALAN

Tomorrow I'm in Washington.

PENELOPE

You have business in Washington?

ALAN

A client of mine, we have an appointment at the Pentagon.

NANCY

The main thing is to get the kids to talk. I'll come over to your place with Ethan at seven-thirty and we'll let them talk it through. What? You don't seem convinced.

PENELOPE

If Zachary hasn't acquired accountability skills, they'll just glare at each other, it will be a disaster.

ALAN

Accountability skills, Mrs. Longstreet? What are you talking about?

PENELOPE

I'm sure your son is not a maniac.

NANCY

Zachary is not a maniac.

ALAN

Yes he is.

NANCY

Alan, don't be an idiot. Why are you saying that?

ALAN

He's a maniac.

MICHAEL

How does he explain what he did?

NANCY

He won't talk about it.

PENELOPE

He should talk about it.

The elevator arrives. ALAN holds the door open and puts one foot inside as he speaks.

ALAN

Mrs. Longstreet, that's a lot of "shoulds". He should come here, he should talk about it, he should feel sorry. I'm sure you're much more proficient than we are. We're trying to get up to speed, but in the meantime try to indulge us.

MICHAEL

Hey come on! What happened here? This isn't what we're about.

With friendly authority, MICHAEL claps a hand on ALAN's shoulder and leads him back into the hallway. The elevator door closes.

PENELOPE
I'm talking about him. About Zachary.

ALAN
I got that, yeah.

NANCY
Alan.

NANCY gives her husband a long look.

In the secret language of couples, the single name pronounced and the reproving look get the best of ALAN.

Everyone walks away from the elevator.

MICHAEL
Want some more coffee?

ALAN
Coffee, all right.

ALAN is resigned, reluctantly retracing his steps.

NANCY
Me too. Coffee, thank you.

PENELOPE has made no signs of going for the coffee.

MICHAEL
It's OK, Pen. I'll get it.

8

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

8

PENELOPE, NANCY and ALAN are standing in the living room. They are all very uncomfortable.

Awkward silence.

NANCY
I see you're an art enthusiast.

NANCY leans over and delicately picks up a book featuring the painter, Bacon.

NANCY (CONT'D)
I love Bacon, too.

PENELOPE
Oh yes, Bacon.

NANCY
 (leafing through the
 book:)
 Cruelty and splendor.

PENELOPE
 Chaos. Balance.

NANCY
 Yes...

PENELOPE
 Is Zachary interested in art?

NANCY
 Not as much as he should be. Your
 children are?

PENELOPE
 We try. We try to make up for the
 lack in the school curriculum.

NANCY
 Right.

PENELOPE
 We try to get them to read. Take them
 to concerts and galleries. I admit we
 believe that culture can be a
 powerful force for peace.

NANCY
 You're so right.

MICHAEL comes back with the coffee.

MICHAEL
 (as he walks in:)
 Is cobbler cake or pie? This is an
 important question. I was in the
 kitchen, thinking. Why should Linzer
 Tart be a pie? Go ahead, go ahead,
 don't leave that miserable little
 piece.

PENELOPE
 Cobbler is a cake. The batter isn't
 flattened to a crust, it's mixed with
 the fruit.

Taking MICHAEL's lead, they sit down again, clearly not for
 long - NANCY hasn't even taken her coat off.

ALAN
 You're a gourmet chef.

PENELOPE

I like cooking. It's something you have to do out of love or not at all. The way I see it, if the batter isn't flattened to a crust, then it's not pie.

MICHAEL

What about you? You have other kids?

ALAN

I have a son by a former marriage.

MICHAEL

I was wondering. I know it's not important but what were they arguing about? Ethan won't say a word on the subject.

NANCY

Ethan wouldn't let Zachary be part of his gang.

PENELOPE

Ethan has a gang?

ALAN

And he called him a snitch.

PENELOPE

(to MICHAEL:)

Did you know that Ethan had a gang?

MICHAEL

No. But I'm thrilled to hear it.

PENELOPE

Why are you thrilled?

MICHAEL

Cause I had one too, I was the leader.

ALAN

So was I.

PENELOPE

What does the leader of a gang do?

MICHAEL

You got five, six guys who like you and they're willing to sacrifice themselves for you. Like in Ivanhoe.

ALAN

Like in Ivanhoe, exactly!

PENELOPE

Who even knows Ivanhoe nowadays?

ALAN

So it's another role model. Like Spiderman.

PENELOPE

Well apparently you know more about it than we do. Zachary wasn't quite as silent as you first said he was. And why did he call him a snitch? Forget it, that's silly. That's a silly question. I mean I don't even care, that's not the point.

NANCY

We're not going to get into these children's quarrels.

PENELOPE

It's none of our business.

NANCY

Right.

PENELOPE

What is our business is this unfortunate incident. Violence is our business.

MICHAEL

When I was a leader, in fifth grade, I beat Jimmy Leach in a fair fight and he was stronger than me.

PENELOPE

What does that mean, Michael? What has that got to do with anything?

MICHAEL

No, nothing.

PENELOPE

We're not talking about a fair fight. These children weren't having a fight.

MICHAEL

Right, right. I was just remembering something.

ALAN

It's not very different.

PENELOPE

Yes it is. Excuse me but there is a difference.

MICHAEL
There is a difference.

ALAN
What difference?

MICHAEL
Jimmy Leach and me, we agreed to fight.

ALAN
Did you mess him up?

MICHAEL
A little, sure.

PENELOPE
All right, enough about Jimmy Leach.
Would you mind if I talked to Zachary?

NANCY
Of course not!

PENELOPE
I wouldn't do it without your permission.

NANCY
Talk to him. That's completely fine with us.

ALAN
And good luck with that.

NANCY
Stop it, Alan. I don't understand you.

ALAN
Mrs. Longstreet is acting...

PENELOPE
Penelope. I think we'll do better if we're on a first name basis.

ALAN
Penelope, you're acting on a desire to educate, and I think that's just great...

PENELOPE
If you don't want me to talk to him, I won't.

ALAN
Go ahead and talk to him, lecture him, do whatever you want.

PENELOPE
I don't understand how you feel so
uninvolved here.

ALAN
Mrs...

MICHAEL
Penelope.

ALAN
Penelope, I am very involved. My son
injured another child...

PENELOPE
Deliberately.

ALAN
See, that's the kind of thing that
irks me. We know deliberately.

PENELOPE
But that's what makes all the
difference.

ALAN
The difference between what and what?
We're only talking about one thing
here. Our kid picked up a stick and
hit your kid. That's why we're here,
right?

NANCY
Fruitless.

MICHAEL
Right, she's right. This kind of talk
is fruitless.

ALAN
Why do you feel you need to slip in
the word deliberately? What kind of
lesson are you trying to teach me?

NANCY
(suddenly rising:)
All right, this is getting silly. My
husband is all stressed out over work
stuff. I'll come back here tonight
with Zachary and we'll let them work
it out naturally.

ALAN
I am not stressed out in the least.

NANCY
Well I am.

MICHAEL

There's no reason to be stressed out.

NANCY

Yes there is.

ALAN's cell vibrates.

He rises and takes a step away, trying to keep his conversation separate.

While he speaks on the phone, the others try to continue their own dialog.

ALAN

Don't answer.

(beat)

No comment.

(beat)

No, you can't recall it! If you recall it, you're admitting responsibility!

(beat)

Recalling Antril would be admitting your responsibility!

PENELOPE

In the school play last Christmas, wasn't it Zachary who played...

NANCY

Ebenezer Scrooge.

ALAN

There's nothing budgeted in the annual report. I mean if you want to get accused of accounting irregularities, if you want them to haul you out of the meeting in handcuffs two weeks from now, go right ahead and recall it!

PENELOPE

Ebenezer Scrooge, right.

In order to counter the nuisance of the other conversation, ALAN speaks louder and louder into his phone.

ALAN

Talk about the victims after the stockholders' meeting Gary.

(beat)

We'll see where the stock is after the meeting.

PENELOPE raises her voice as well, to compensate.

PENELOPE

He was wonderful.

NANCY sits down with some difficulty. She doesn't look well.

NANCY

Yes.

ALAN

We can't recall a drug because three
guys can't walk a straight line!

(beat)

Don't answer at all right now.

(beat)

Right, call you right back.

ALAN hangs up and immediately calls his assistant.

PENELOPE

We remember him as Scrooge. Right
Michael? You remember.

MICHAEL

Sure, sure.

ALAN

(to his assistant:)

They're in panic mode. They have the
media breathing down their necks.

PENELOPE

With that night bonnet. He was very
funny.

NANCY

Yes.

ALAN

(screaming, to be
heard:)

I want a release that doesn't sound
defensive at all. Just the opposite.
Go for the jugular. TW Pharma is a
target. Attempt at manipulation of
the stock two weeks before the
stockholders' meeting. Where did this
study come from anyway? How does this
suddenly drop out of a clear blue
sky, etcetera. Not one word about the
health issue. Only one question: Who
is behind the study? Who?

(beat)

Fine.

A short silence.

MICHAEL
Pharmaceutical companies are the
worst, right? Profit, profit, profit.

ALAN is hardly listening and answers reflexively, all the
while trying to dial another number.

ALAN
Nobody said you should listen to my
conversation.

MICHAEL
Nobody said you should have it under
my nose.

ALAN
(still elsewhere:)
Wrong. I am totally forced to have it
here. Against my will, believe me.

MICHAEL
They just peddle the shit. No
conscience problems.

ALAN has his cell to his ear. He is speaking to MICHAEL, but
obviously waiting for an answer on the phone, which doesn't
come.

ALAN
In any therapeutic advance there are
benefits and there are risks.

MICHAEL
Yeah, sure I know. Still. I mean you
got some funny line of work.

ALAN gives up on his call and comes over to stand in front
of MICHAEL.

ALAN
What does that mean?

PENELOPE
Michael, it's none of our business.

MICHAEL
Funny line of work.

ALAN
What about you, what do you do?

MICHAEL
I got a normal job.

ALAN
What's a normal job?

MICHAEL

I told you, I sell pots and pans.

ALAN

And door handles.

MICHAEL

And flush mechanisms. And lot of other stuff.

ALAN

Oh, flush mechanisms. I like that. That's interesting.

NANCY

Alan.

ALAN

I find that interesting. Flush toilets are interesting.

MICHAEL

Why not?

ALAN

How many different kinds do you have?

MICHAEL

There are two basic kinds. You got your push button and your handle operated.

ALAN

Right, yeah.

MICHAEL

Depends where your water line is.

ALAN

I see.

MICHAEL

It either comes from the side near the top, or it comes from the bottom.

ALAN

Right.

MICHAEL

One of my store managers is an expert. I could introduce you if you want, but you'll have to hump it out to Jamaica, Queens.

ALAN

You seem like you know your business pretty well.

PENELOPE

Do you plan to sanction Zachary in some way? You can continue your plumbing discussion in a more suitable setting.

NANCY

I don't feel well.

NANCY rises, takes off her coat, tries to breathe easy as she walks around the room.

PENELOPE

What's the matter?

ALAN

Oh, you do look pale honey.

MICHAEL

You're all white, yeah.

NANCY

I'm nauseous.

PENELOPE is on the case, quickly concerned.

PENELOPE

Nauseous? I have some Reglan.

NANCY

No. I'll be fine.

PENELOPE

What could we..? Coke. What you need is a Coke.

The words are hardly out and she dashes off to the kitchen.

9

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

9

In the kitchen, Peneleope swings the refrigerator door open - no Coke. She opens a pantry closet and finds a six-pack of Coke, tears one out of the plastic.

She opens it as she rushes out.

10

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

10

PENELOPE comes running back into the living room and hands the can to NANCY.

PENELOPE

(terribly sorry:)
It's not cold.
(to MICHAEL:)
It's not cold!

NANCY

You think?

PENELOPE

Oh yes. Little sips.

NANCY

Thanks.

PENELOPE

(to MICHAEL:)

The Coke was not in the refrigerator!

Meantime, ALAN has discreetly called his office back and is listening to someone on the phone.

ALAN

Have him call me back. Tell him right away.

(hangs up)

Is Coke good for that? It's more for diarrhea, isn't it?

PENELOPE

Not only.

(to NANCY:)

Better?

NANCY

I'm fine. Mrs. Longstreet, if we decide to reprimand our child, we'll do it in our own way and on our own terms.

MICHAEL

Absolutely.

PENELOPE

What absolutely, Michael?

MICHAEL

He's their son, they're free to do as they see fit.

PENELOPE

I don't agree.

MICHAEL

You don't agree about what, Penny?

PENELOPE

They're not free.

ALAN

Is that right? Go on.

(cell vibrates:)

Oh, sorry.

(to his assistant:)

(MORE)

ALAN (CONT'D)

Great.

(beat)

But don't forget, nothing has been proven here, nothing is certain.

(beat)

Don't fuck this up. If we don't get this right, Gary will be out on his ear in two weeks, and so will we.

NANCY

Enough, Alan! Enough with the cell phone already! The here and now god dammit!

ALAN

Yeah.

(beat)

Call me back and read it to me.

(hangs up)

What the hell is wrong with you? Screaming at me like that! Dennis heard every word!

NANCY

Good! I'm sick of that fucking cell phone, every minute of every day!

ALAN

Listen Nancy, you should be thanking me for agreeing to come here...

PENELOPE

That's outrageous.

NANCY

I'm going to throw up.

ALAN

No, you're not.

NANCY

I am.

MICHAEL

You want to use the bathroom?

NANCY

(to ALAN:)

Nobody's forcing you to stay...

PENELOPE

No, nobody's forcing him to stay.

NANCY

I'm dizzy.

ALAN

Stare at a point in space. Stare at a point in space, Doodle.

NANCY

Get away from me. Leave me alone.

PENELOPE

She should really go to the bathroom, though.

ALAN

Go to the bathroom. Go to the bathroom if you're going to throw up.

MICHAEL

Give her some Reglan.

ALAN

It can't be the cobbler, can it?

PENELOPE

I made it yesterday!

Alan tries to put his arm around Nancy.

NANCY

(to ALAN:)
Don't touch me!

ALAN

Take it easy, Doodle.

MICHAEL

Come on, don't get all bent out of shape over nothing.

NANCY

My husband feels that anything to do with the house, the school, the backyard, is my domain.

ALAN

I do not!

NANCY

You do so. And I can understand why. It's all so excruciatingly boring. It's excruciating.

PENELOPE

If it's so excruciating, why have children in the first place?

MICHAEL

Maybe Zachary picks up on that lack of interest.

NANCY
What lack of interest?!

MICHAEL
You said it yourself...

NANCY vomits violently. A sudden, catastrophic regurgitation and part of it gets on ALAN.

The art books on the coffee table are also splashed.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)
Go get a bucket, go get a bucket.

PENELOPE rushes off while MICHAEL holds out the coffee tray, just in case.

NANCY heaves again, but nothing comes out.

ALAN
You should have gone to the bathroom,
Doodle. This is ridiculous.

MICHAEL
Your suit took a hit.

11 INT. HALLWAY IN LONGSTREET APARTMENT - DAY 11

PENELOPE opens the broom closet and snatches a mop and pail from within.

PENELOPE
(to herself:)
That stupid bitch!

12 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY 12

PENELOPE very quickly returns with the mop and pail.

PENELOPE
(as she enters the
room:)
It couldn't be the cobbler. That much
I'm certain of.

The pail is passed to NANCY.

MICHAEL
It's not the cobbler, it's nerves.
This is just nerves.

PENELOPE
(to ALAN:)
You want to clean up in the bathroom?
Oh my God, my Kokoschka. Oh no.

NANCY vomits bile into the pail.

MICHAEL
Give her some Reglan.

PENELOPE
Not right away. She couldn't keep
anything down right now.

ALAN
Where's the bathroom?

PENELOPE
I'll show you the way.

PENELOPE and ALAN exit.

13 INT. HALLWAY - DAY 13

ALAN follows PENELOPE down the hall, past the kitchen and the broom closet and, after a quick turn, they reach the bathroom door. PENELOPE opens it and goes inside first.

14 INT. BATHROOM - DAY 14

PENELOPE quickly puts away a couple of personal items.

ALAN enters. He has already removed his jacket and tie and his shirt has been sullied as well.

The room is small and they are embarrassingly close to one another. PENELOPE is overheated.

She walks out.

ALAN is alone. He turns the faucet on and starts to wash his jacket.

ALAN
Fuck!

15 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY 15

In the living room, NANCY is still leaning over the pail. MICHAEL is beside her.

MICHAEL
Like I always say, you can't get over
something when you're under it.

NANCY
Uh-huh.

MICHAEL

With me it's the back of my neck.
Gets all blocked up back there.

NANCY

Uh-huh.

She spits up a little more bile.

PENELOPE, as frenetic as ever, comes back with a basin of water and a sponge.

PENELOPE

What do we do about the Kokoschka?

MICHAEL

Mr. Clean, I guess. Only problem is
drying it. Or else with plain water
and you put some cologne on there.

PENELOPE

Cologne?

MICHAEL

I got some Kouros I never use.

PENELOPE

The paper will warp.

MICHAEL

We could blow-dry it, then flatten it
out with some other books on top. Or
else iron it like dollar bills.

PENELOPE

Oh God.

NANCY

I'll buy you another one.

PENELOPE

There is no other one. It's been out-
of-print for ages.

NANCY

I'm so sorry.

MICHAEL

We can save it. Let me do this, Pen.

She hands him the basin and the sponge, wrinkling her nose.

MICHAEL starts cleaning the book.

PENELOPE

It's a reprint, from more than twenty years ago, of the catalog from the 1953 show in London.

MICHAEL

Go get the blow-dryer. And the Kouros. It's in the bathroom cabinet with the linens.

PENELOPE

Her husband is in the bathroom.

MICHAEL

He's not naked!

She exits and he continues to clean.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I got most of it off. Little bit on the Dolgans...

16 INT. BATHROOM - DAY

16

A knock on the door. PENELOPE enters.

ALAN is drying his jacket with the hair dryer.

She grabs the Kouros and goes back out.

18 INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

18

MICHAEL is now on all fours, cleaning the vomit off the floor.

PENELOPE

(to NANCY:)
Are you feeling better?

NANCY

Yes.

PENELOPE

(to MICHAEL:)
Should I spray?

MICHAEL

Where's the blow-dryer?

PENELOPE

He's using it.

MICHAEL

We'll wait. We'll put the Kouros on there last.

NANCY
May I use the bathroom, too?

PENELOPE
Of course. Yes, of course, of course.

NANCY
I don't know what to say, I'm so
sorry.

19 INT. HALLWAY - DAY 19

PENELOPE shows NANCY down the hall.

PENELOPE
Bring the blow dryer when you come
back.

NANCY enters the bathroom - PENELOPE closes the door behind
her.

20 INT. BATHROOM - DAY 20

In the bathroom, NANCY is seated on the edge of the tub, her
arms at her sides.

ALAN, shirtless, is now drying his shirt. His vest is
hanging on a peg above some bathrobes.

ALAN
That was unbelievable, what you did.

NANCY nods, cannot suppress a tiny smile.

ALAN (CONT'D)
Her cobbler is horrible.

NANCY
You stuffed your face!

NANCY rises. ALAN steps back to let her clean her face at
the sink.

ALAN
Look at my day! I have to get some
food in me some time!

After gargling, NANCY sits back down on the edge of the tub.
ALAN puts his shirt back on.

NANCY
What the hell are we doing here?

ALAN
 (beat, in utter
 disbelief:)
 You're kidding I hope!

NANCY
 Why do you argue with her? We'd have
 been out of here a long time ago if
 you didn't bicker over every word.

ALAN
 You'd rather I was a sheep, like her
 husband?

NANCY
 You think it was the cobbler?

ALAN
 Of course it was! A little warm Coke
 and bang!

21

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

21

In the living room, MICHAEL and PENELOPE are finishing the
 restoration of the books.

PENELOPE
 What a freaking nightmare!

MICHAEL
 He better watch it, he's got me right
 on the edge.

PENELOPE
 She's horrible too.

MICHAEL
 Less.

PENELOPE
 She's so fake.

MICHAEL
 She doesn't bother me that much.

PENELOPE
 They're both horrible. Why do you
 take their side?

She sprays the tulips.

MICHAEL
 I don't take their side. What is that
 supposed to mean?

PENELOPE
You mitigate. You're trying to
reconcile everything.

MICHAEL
I am not!

PENELOPE
You are. You had your gang and you
were the leader, and they can do
whatever they want with their son.
Their son is a threat to homeland
security! When a kid is a menace to
society it's everybody's business. I
can't believe she barfed all over my
books!

She sprays the Kokoschka.

MICHAEL holds the Dolgans book so she can spray it, too.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)
When you know you're going to toss
your cookies, you take precautions.

MICHAEL holds up the Foujita.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)
(whimpering)
The Foujita!

She sprays everything, including herself.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)
Disgusting.

MICHAEL
I was right on the edge with that
toilet flushing shit.

PENELOPE
You were incredible.

MICHAEL
I held my own, right?

PENELOPE
Incredible. The store owner was
incredible.

MICHAEL
Little piece of shit. What does he
call her?!

PENELOPE
Doodle.

MICHAEL

Yeah right, Doodle!

PENELOPE

Doodle!

They both laugh out loud as Alan appears, holding the blow dryer.

ALAN

Yes, I call her Doodle.

PENELOPE

Oh, I'm sorry. We didn't mean anything. It's so easy to make fun of other people's pet names. Like what do we call each other, Michael? I'm sure it's worse!

ALAN

You wanted the blow dryer?

PENELOPE

Thank you.

MICHAEL

Thanks.

(taking the blow-dryer:)

We call each other darjeeling, like the tea. Ask me, that's a lot more embarrassing!

MICHAEL plugs in the dryer and starts trying to dry the books. The blow dryer's electric cord is relatively short - he has to bring the books over to work on them.

PENELOPE smooths the wet pages of the Kokoschka catalog.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Smooth it out, smooth it out.

As she smooths out the pages, she raises her voice to be heard over the dryer.

PENELOPE

How is she? Is she better? The poor thing.

ALAN

Better.

PENELOPE

I reacted badly. I'm ashamed of myself.

ALAN

No.

PENELOPE

I rubbed it in, about the catalog. I can't believe I did that.

MICHAEL

Turn the page. Pull it taut. Nice and taut.

ALAN

It's going to tear.

PENELOPE

He's right. Michael, that's enough, it's dry. You get so absurdly attached to things, you don't even really know why.

MICHAEL closes the catalog and the two of them pile some heavy books on top of it.

MICHAEL dries the Foujita, the Dolgans, etc.

MICHAEL

There! Good as new. So where does Doodle come from? Yankee Doodle? Cheese Doodle?

ALAN

No, it's a song from *Guys and Dolls* that goes, Doodle oodle oodle oo.

MICHAEL

I know that! I know that!

(singing:)

I love you a bushel and a peck, you bet your pretty neck I do. Doodle, oodle, oodle, doodle, oodle, oodle... Ha, ha! Ours is from our honeymoon in India. I called her darjeeling instead of darling. So stupid.

PENELOPE

Should I maybe go check on her?

MICHAEL

Go ahead, darjeeling.

PENELOPE walks to the door. She bumps into NANCY, on her way back to the living room.

PENELOPE

Oh Nancy! I was getting worried. All better?

NANCY

I think so.

ALAN

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

NANCY

I left the towel in the bathtub. I
didn't know where to put it.

PENELOPE

Perfect.

NANCY

I see you cleaned up. I'm so sorry.

MICHAEL

Everything is just fine. All is
well.

PENELOPE

Nancy, I'm sorry. I wasn't really
there for you. I was so focused on my
Kokoschka.

NANCY

That's all right.

PENELOPE

I reacted very poorly.

NANCY

Please.

Awkward silence.

NANCY (CONT'D)

In the bathroom I was thinking.

PENELOPE

(as nicely as she
possibly can:)

Yeah?

NANCY

Maybe we glossed over the... Well I
mean...

MICHAEL

What is it, Nancy? What?

NANCY

Name-calling is a kind of abuse.

MICHAEL

Sure.

PENELOPE

Depends, Michael.

MICHAEL

Right. Depends.

NANCY

Zachary has never been a violent child. He must have had his reasons.

ALAN

Like getting called a snitch!

His cell phone vibrates.

ALAN (CONT'D)

Excuse me.

He walks away, making apologetic gestures to NANCY.

ALAN (CONT'D)

Yeah.

(beat)

As long as there are no comments from the victims. No victims. I don't want you sitting down with victims.

(beat)

Deny, deny, deny. And if we have to, we'll sue the journal. We'll fax you the draft of the press release, Gary.

(hangs up)

Call me a snitch, it gets a rise out of me.

MICHAEL

Unless it's true.

ALAN

What?

MICHAEL

I mean if the shoe fits.

NANCY

My son is a snitch?

MICHAEL

Come on, I was joking around.

NANCY

So is yours anyway.

MICHAEL

What do you mean so is ours?

NANCY

He fingered Zachary.

MICHAEL

We coaxed it out of him!

PENELOPE

Michael, we're completely off point here.

NANCY

Nevertheless. Maybe you coaxed, but he did finger him.

ALAN

Nancy.

NANCY

Nancy what?

(to MICHAEL:)

You think my son is a snitch?

MICHAEL

I don't think anything.

NANCY

Well if you don't think anything then don't say anything. Don't make insinuations.

PENELOPE

Nancy, let's not lose our cool here. Michael and I have gone out of our way to be conciliating and fair-minded...

NANCY

Not so fair-minded.

PENELOPE

Oh really? How's that?

NANCY

Superficially fair-minded.

ALAN

Doodle, I really have to go.

NANCY

So go. Coward.

ALAN

Nancy, right now I'm in danger of losing my most important client. So this caring parents crap and the bickering that goes along with it...

PENELOPE

My son lost two teeth. Two incisors.

ALAN

Right, yeah. I think we got that.

PENELOPE

One of them permanently.

ALAN

He'll get new teeth, they'll give him new teeth! Better teeth! No one chewed his ear off!

NANCY

It was a mistake not to consider the source of the problem.

PENELOPE

There is no source. There's an eleven-year-old kid who hits people. With a stick!

ALAN

Armed with a stick.

MICHAEL

We took that word out.

ALAN

You took it out because we asked you to.

MICHAEL

We took it out with no argument.

ALAN

A word which deliberately establishes intent and excludes any hint of a misunderstanding. Which excludes childhood.

PENELOPE

I'm not sure I can put up with that tone of voice.

ALAN

We're not quite on the same page, you and I. Right from the start.

PENELOPE

Mr. Cowan, there is nothing so frustrating as being upbraided for something we ourselves admitted was a mistake. The word "armed" wasn't right, we changed it. Although, strictly defined, it certainly applies.

NANCY

Zachary was verbally abused and he reacted. If I'm attacked I defend myself, especially when I'm all alone against a whole gang.

MICHAEL

Well, you've certainly perked up since you tossed your cookies.

NANCY

Do you realize how crude that expression is?

MICHAEL

We're all people of good will. All four of us. How do we get all carried away, losing our tempers? It's entirely unnecessary.

PENELOPE

Oh Michael, stop it! That's enough mitigating. We're only superficially fair-minded, so let's not be fair-minded at all!

MICHAEL

Oh no, I'm not going to be led down that path.

ALAN

What path?

MICHAEL

The path those two little shit-for-brains sent us down! All right?

ALAN

I'm afraid Pen doesn't see things that way.

PENELOPE

Penelope!

ALAN

Sorry.

PENELOPE

So now poor Ethan is a shit-for-brains. That really takes the cake.

ALAN

OK, that's it. I really have to leave now.

NANCY

So do I.

PENELOPE

Go. Go. I give up.

The COWAN family's telephone rings.

MICHAEL

Hello?

(beat)

Oh Ma.

(beat)

No, we got some friends over but go ahead.

(beat)

Yes, stop taking them. Do what they tell you to do.

(beat)

You're taking... You're taking Antril?! Wait, wait. Hang on a second, Ma.

(to ALAN:)

Is that Antril? That nasty shit of yours, is that Antril? My mother's taking it!

ALAN

Thousands of people take it.

MICHAEL

All right, you stop taking that one immediately. You hear me, Ma? Right now.

(beat)

Don't argue. I'll explain later.

(beat)

So tell Dr. Perlstein that I won't let you.

(beat)

Why red?

(beat)

So who can see you?

(beat)

That's idiotic.

(beat)

All right, we'll talk about it later. Take care of yourself, Ma. I'll call you back.

(hangs up)

She got red crutches so she won't get run over by a truck. Just in case, in her condition, she wanders out on the highway in the middle of the night. They're giving her Antril for her blood pressure.

ALAN

If she's taking it and she looks normal, I'll take her deposition. Didn't I have a scarf? Oh there it is.

MICHAEL

I don't like that attitude of yours. If my mother has the slightest symptom, my name will be at the top of a class-action suit.

ALAN

We'll have one anyway.

MICHAEL

I should hope so!

NANCY

Goodbye, Mrs. Longstreet.

PENELOPE

Doing the right thing is futile. Honesty is just stupidity. All it does is weaken you. You let your guard down.

ALAN

OK, let's go Nancy. That's enough sermons and lectures for one day.

ALAN picks up NANCY's coat and hands it to her, then leads her toward the foyer. Nancy puts her coat on as she crosses the room.

MICHAEL

(taking a step or two after them:)

Go ahead, go. But let me tell you one thing. Now that I know you, I think what's-his-name, Zachary, may have some pretty extenuating circumstances.

NANCY stops and turns half-way toward MICHAEL.

NANCY

When you killed that hamster...

MICHAEL

Killed?!

NANCY

Killed.

MICHAEL

I killed the hamster?!

NANCY

Yes. You do everything you can to make us feel guilty, you stake out the moral highground as your own, but you yourself are a murderer.

MICHAEL

I definitely did not kill that hamster!

NANCY

Worse. You left it out there, trembling with fear in a hostile environment. That poor critter was probably eaten by a dog or a rat.

PENELOPE

She's right about that! She's right about that!

MICHAEL

What do you mean she's right?

PENELOPE

She is. I mean, seriously. It's horrible, what must have happened to that animal!

MICHAEL

I thought the hamster would be happy to be free. I was sure he'd go running around in the gutter, happy as a clam!

PENELOPE

He didn't.

NANCY

And you just left him there.

MICHAEL

I can't touch those things! I can't touch anything of that family. Christ, Penny, you know that!

PENELOPE

He's afraid of rodents.

MICHAEL

Yes, I have a fear of rodents. I'm terrified of reptiles. Anything down close to the ground, no thanks! That's all it is.

ALAN

(to PENELOPE:)

What about you? How come you didn't go downstairs and get it?

PENELOPE

Hey, I didn't even know! Michael told the kids and me, the next morning, that the hamster ran away.

(MORE)

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

I went right out looking for it, I went right out. I went all the way around the block, I even went down to the cellar.

MICHAEL

Penelope, it is completely unfair that all of a sudden I'm in the hot seat about this hamster thing, that you just had to tell them about. That's a family issue that doesn't concern anybody but us and it's got nothing to do with this situation here! And I can't believe I'm getting called a murderer! In my own house!

PENELOPE

What does your house have to do with the price of tea in China?

MICHAEL

It's my house and I open the doors, the doors are wide open in a spirit of conciliation, to people who should be a little grateful!

ALAN

Keep right on stroking your own ego, it's beautiful.

NANCY

You have no remorse?

MICHAEL

I have no remorse. That animal was repulsive. I'm thrilled it's gone.

PENELOPE

Michael, that's ridiculous.

MICHAEL

What's ridiculous? What, have you lost your mind, too, now? Their son beats the shit out of Ethan and you're in my face over a hamster?

PENELOPE

What you did with that hamster was wrong, you can't deny that.

MICHAEL

I don't give a fuck about that hamster!

PENELOPE

You'll have to give a fuck tonight when your daughter gets home.

MICHAEL

Bring her on! I'm not going to be told how to act by a nine-year-old snotnose brat!

ALAN

Now I agree with him there, a hundred percent.

PENELOPE

That's pathetic.

MICHAEL

Watch it, Penelope, watch it. I've kept my shirt on up till now, but you're pushing me over a line.

NANCY

And Ethan?

MICHAEL

What about Ethan?

NANCY

Is he sad too?

MICHAEL

Ethan's got other things on his plate, if you ask me.

PENELOPE

Ethan wasn't so attached to Nibbles.

MICHAEL

What kind of insipid name is that anyway?!

NANCY

If you feel no remorse, why should our son?

MICHAEL

You know what? All this consultation and consideration shit, I'm sick to death of it. We were nice to you. We bought tulips. My wife dressed me up as a liberal, but the truth of the matter is I got no sense of decorum and I'm a temperamental son of a bitch to the core.

ALAN

We all are.

PENELOPE

No. No, I'm sorry. We are not all temperamental sons of bitches.

ALAN

Not you, of course.

PENELOPE

No, not me! Thank heavens!

MICHAEL

Not you, darjee, not you. You're so evolved. You never go off half-cocked.

PENELOPE

Why are you being so aggressive with me?

MICHAEL

I'm not being aggressive. Just the opposite.

PENELOPE

Yes you are aggressive, and you know it.

MICHAEL

You put this little bash together and I let you recruit me...

PENELOPE

You let me recruit you?

MICHAEL

Yes.

PENELOPE

That is so disgusting.

MICHAEL

No, it's not. You're an advocate for civilized behavior, well that's fine with me.

PENELOPE

I'm an advocate for civilized behavior, you bet I am! And it's a good thing somebody is!

(on the verge of
tears:)

You think it's better to be a son of a bitch?

ALAN

All right, all right...

PENELOPE

(still about to cry:)

That's OK to criticize someone for not being a temperamental son of a bitch?

NANCY

Nobody said that. Nobody criticized you for that.

PENELOPE

You did!
(she cries)

ALAN

We did not.

PENELOPE

What was I supposed to do? Sue you? Never talk to you and tear you to pieces through the insurance company?

MICHAEL

Stop it, Penny.

PENELOPE

Stop what?!

MICHAEL

You're blowing this all out of proportion.

PENELOPE

I don't care! You do everything you can to avoid the pettiness and you wind up humiliated and completely alone!

ALAN's cell vibrates again.

ALAN

Yes.

(beat)

Let them prove it!

(beat)

Prove it!

(beat)

From where I sit, the best thing for us to do is do nothing.

MICHAEL

We're always alone! Everywhere we go! Who wants a little Scotch?

ALAN

Gary, I'm in a meeting right now. I'll call you when I get back to the office.

He hangs up.

PENELOPE

That's the thing. I am living with a totally negative person.

ALAN
Who's negative?

MICHAEL
Me.

PENELOPE
This was the worst possible idea! We should never have had this meeting at all!

MICHAEL
I told you so.

PENELOPE
You told me so?

MICHAEL
Yeah.

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

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

MICHAEL crosses to the liquor cabinet, pulls out a bottle of scotch.

NANCY
It was a good idea.

MICHAEL
Oh come on!
(holding up the
bottle:)
Who wants some?

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

MICHAEL
As I recall.

PENELOPE
As you recall!

ALAN
Maybe just a sip.

NANCY
Don't you have to go?

ALAN

At this point, I might as well have a little drink.

MICHAEL pours two glasses of scotch and hands one to ALAN.

PENELOPE

Look me in the eyes and tell me again we didn't both agree to this!

NANCY

Calm down, Penelope, calm down. This is going nowhere.

PENELOPE

Who said not to touch the cobbler this morning? Who said we should keep the rest for the Cowan's? Who said that?!

ALAN

That was very nice of you.

MICHAEL

What's that got to do with it?

PENELOPE

What do you mean what has it got to do with it?!

MICHAEL

Guests are guests.

PENELOPE

You're lying, you're lying! He's lying!

ALAN

You know my wife actually had to drag me here today. When you grow up with a certain John Wayne idea of manhood, the impulse in this kind of situation is not to talk it through.

MICHAEL

Ha, ha!

NANCY

I thought the role model was Ivanhoe.

ALAN

Same basic concept.

MICHAEL

Another aspect.

PENELOPE

Another aspect! Just how much are you going to humiliate yourself, Michael?

NANCY

I can see I dragged him here for nothing.

ALAN

What did you expect, Doodle? That is a ridiculous nickname. Some revelation about universal values? This scotch is unbelievable.

MICHAEL

Ah! See that? 18 years old, single malt, from a tiny place in Scotland where they still grow their own barley.

PENELOPE

And the tulips, who went to get them? All I said was it's a pity we don't have tulips. I never said anything about going all the way up to Sullivan at dawn.

NANCY

Don't get all bent out of shape over this, Penelope, it isn't worth it.

PENELOPE

He got the tulips! Him and only him! Don't we get a drink?

NANCY

Penelope and I would like a drink, too. Pretty funny when you think about it, a direct descendant of Ivanhoe and John Wayne but he's scared to pick up an itty-bitty mouse.

MICHAEL

Stop with the hamster! Stop!

MICHAEL serves NANCY some scotch.

PENELOPE

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

NANCY

And her?

MICHAEL

I don't think that will be necessary.

PENELOPE
Pour me a drink, Michael.

MICHAEL
No.

PENELOPE
Michael!

MICHAEL
No.

PENELOPE tries to tear the bottle away from him.

MICHAEL won't let her.

NANCY
What is wrong with you, Michael?!

MICHAEL hands PENELOPE the bottle.

MICHAEL
Fine, go ahead. Drink, drink, what does it matter?

NANCY
Is drinking bad for you or something?

PENELOPE
It's great for me. What could be bad anyway?

She pours herself a drink, takes a sip, breaks down crying.

ALAN
Well... Now I don't know...

PENELOPE
(to ALAN:)
Mr. uh...

NANCY
Alan.

PENELOPE
Alan, you and I didn't exactly hit it off but you see, I live with a man who has decided once and for all that life is synonymous with mediocrity. It's very hard to live with a man who's walled himself up in that notion, who doesn't want to change anything, who never gets excited about anything.

MICHAEL

What does he care? He couldn't care less.

PENELOPE

One needs to believe. To believe in some possible correction, right?

MICHAEL

He's the last guy on earth you should be telling all this to.

PENELOPE

I'll talk to anyone I damn well please!

The LONGSTREET family phone rings.

MICHAEL

Who the fuck is that now?
(reading the caller ID and picking up:)

Yes, Ma.

(beat)

He's fine. Well I mean he got his teeth knocked out but he's fine.

(beat)

Sure it hurts. It hurts now, it'll pass. Ma, I'm busy. I'll call you back.

NANCY

He's still in pain?

PENELOPE

No.

NANCY

Then why do you worry your mother?

PENELOPE

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

MICHAEL

OK, that's enough Penelope! What is this drama queen bullshit?

ALAN

Penelope, who really cares about anything outside himself? Sure, we'd all like to believe in some kind of possible correction, one we could author ourselves, completely free of selfish consideration. But is that really even possible? Some people drag their feet through life, that's just how they are.

(MORE)

ALAN (CONT'D)

And some can't stand still while the sands of time run out. We all keep fussing and fidgeting till we drop dead. Education, global strife... Like you're writing this book about Darfur, and that's great. I understand how you might say, OK, I'll pick a massacre, history is full of them, and I'm going to write about it. Everybody has to save himself somehow.

PENELOPE

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

ALAN

Whatever.

PENELOPE

That odor of Kouros is killing me!

MICHAEL

It's an abomination.

ALAN

You didn't exactly skimp.

NANCY

I'm sorry.

PENELOPE

It's not your fault. I'm the one who sprayed like a madwoman. And why can't we just take it easy once in a while? Why does everything always have to be so exhausting?

ALAN

You think too much. Women think too much.

NANCY

(sarcastic:)
There's an original response!
(to Penelope:)
Which must be pleasantly disconcerting to you.

PENELOPE

I don't know what that means, to think too much. And I don't understand how you can go on living without some moral sense of the world.

MICHAEL

Look at me, I'm living!

PENELOPE

Shut up! Shut up! I detest that wretched complicity of yours! You disgust me!

MICHAEL

Where's your sense of humor?

PENELOPE

I have no sense of humor. And I don't want one.

MICHAEL

If you ask me, the couple is the most terrible ordeal God ever inflicted on us.

NANCY

Marvelous.

MICHAEL

The couple and the family.

NANCY

No one's forcing you to air this out in front of us, Michael. And I might add, it's a little indecent.

PENELOPE

That doesn't bother him.

MICHAEL

Don't you agree?

NANCY

This is all off point. Alan, say something.

ALAN

He has a right to his ideas.

NANCY

That doesn't mean he has to advertise them.

ALAN

Yeah, all right, maybe...

NANCY

We don't care about their marriage. We're here about a problem with the kids. We don't care about their marriage.

ALAN

Yeah, except...

NANCY

Except what? What are you saying?

ALAN

It is related.

MICHAEL

It's related! Of course it's related!

PENELOPE

Ethan's getting two of his teeth broken is related to our marriage?!

MICHAEL

Of course it is.

NANCY

We don't follow you.

MICHAEL

Turn this thing around and take stock of the situation we're in. Children soak up our lives, then they blow them apart. Children lead us to disaster, it's like a law of nature. You see these young couples, laughing all the way to the altar, and you think they don't know. Poor bastards don't know a thing. They're happy. Nobody briefs you in the beginning. This army buddy of mine is going to have a kid with his new girlfriend. I say to him, a kid at our age, what are you stupid? You got ten, fifteen good years left before you get cancer or have a stroke and you're going to saddle yourself with a fucking kid?

NANCY

That's not really what you think.

PENELOPE

Yes it is.

MICHAEL

Of course it's what I think. I think even worse.

PENELOPE

Yes.

NANCY

You're debasing yourself, Michael.

MICHAEL
Is that right? Ha, ha!

NANCY
Stop crying, Penelope. It only makes
it worse.

ALAN fills his empty glass. MICHAEL is thrilled.

MICHAEL
Go ahead, go ahead. Excellent, isn't
it?

ALAN
Excellent.

MICHAEL
Could I interest you in a cigar?

PENELOPE
No! No cigars here!

ALAN
Too bad.

NANCY
Were you going to smoke a cigar now,
Alan?

ALAN
I do what I want, Nancy. If I want to
smoke a cigar, I smoke a cigar. I
won't smoke it because I don't want
to upset Penelope who's already on
edge, to put it mildly.

(to PENELOPE:)
She's right, quit snuffling like
that. When women cry, men are pushed
to a breaking point. Although
unfortunately, I must say that
Michael's point of view is completely
justified.

The cell phone vibrates.

ALAN (CONT'D)
Yes, Dennis.
(beat)
Go ahead.
(beat)
Put New York, and a specific time of
day.

NANCY
It's unbearable!

ALAN moves away a little and keeps his voice down, to escape
NANCY's ire.

ALAN

The time you send it. It has to be hot off the press.

(beat)

No, not "questions". "Deplores". Questions is wishy-washy.

NANCY

I live with this night and day! He's glued to his cell phone! Our lives are chopped up by the cell phone.

ALAN

Uh... One second.

(covering the phone:)

Nancy, this is very important.

NANCY

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

ALAN

(back to call:)

Go ahead.

(beat)

Yeah.

(beat)

Not "strategy". "Scheme". A scheme surfacing two weeks from the company's posting, etcetera.

NANCY

In the street. At the dinner table. Everywhere.

ALAN

"A study" in quotes. Put the word "study" in quotes.

NANCY

I don't even protest anymore. Unconditional surrender. I feel like I'm going to vomit again.

MICHAEL

Where's that bucket?

PENELOPE

I don't know.

ALAN

Then just quote me. "This is a barefaced attempt to manipulate the stock price..."

PENELOPE

It's over there. Go stand near it,
please.

MICHAEL

Pen.

PENELOPE

It's all right. We're set up to
handle this now.

ALAN

"...the stock price and destabilize
my client," according to TW Pharma
attorney Alan Cowan.

(beat)

AP, Reuters, major newspapers, trade
journals, the whole shebang.

He hangs up.

MICHAEL

She's going to throw up again.

ALAN

What is wrong with you?!

NANCY

You're so caring, it's touching.

ALAN

I'm worried!

NANCY

I didn't get that. My mistake.

ALAN

Oh come on Nancy, will you! You and
I don't have to do this. Their
marriage is going downhill, we don't
have to try to compete with them!

PENELOPE

What gives you the right to say our
marriage is going downhill? What
gives you the right?

ALAN's cell vibrates again.

ALAN

I just had it read back. They're
sending it over to you, Gary.

(beat)

Manipulation. Manipulation of the
stock price. I'll call you right
back.

(hangs up)

I didn't say it. Steven did.

PENELOPE

Michael.

ALAN

Michael, sorry.

PENELOPE

I won't let you judge our family.

ALAN

Then don't judge our son either.

PENELOPE

That's different! Your son brutalized our son!

ALAN

They're young, they're just kids. Kids roughhouse in the playground, always have always will. It's a rule of nature.

PENELOPE

No! No it isn't!

ALAN

Sure it is. It takes a little education to substitute the rule of law for violence. The origin of law, you might recall, is brute force.

PENELOPE

Maybe for prehistoric man it was. Not in this world.

ALAN

In this world? Tell me about this world.

PENELOPE

You're tiresome. This whole conversation is tiresome.

ALAN

Penelope, I believe in the god of carnage. The god whose rule has been unchallenged since time immemorial. You're interested in Africa, right?

NANCY is retching.

ALAN (CONT'D)

What's the matter?

NANCY

Don't worry about me.

ALAN

Nancy.

NANCY

I'm just fine.

ALAN

See, I just got back from the Congo. They got kids there, trained to kill at the age of eight. In the course of their childhood, they might kill hundreds of people. They'll kill with a machete, a shotgun, a Kalash, a thump gun. So obviously when my son busts some other kid's tooth, even two teeth, with a bamboo switch at the Third Street Playground, I'm not quite as shocked and indignant as you are.

PENELOPE

Well you should be.

NANCY

(exaggerating the
military sound of the
jargon:)

Thump gun!

ALAN

Yes, that's what they call a grenade launcher.

NANCY spits into the pail.

MICHAEL

You all right?

NANCY

I'm just fine.

ALAN

What the hell is wrong with you?
What's wrong with her?

NANCY

It's bile. It's nothing.

PENELOPE

Don't tell me about Africa. I know all about suffering in Africa.

ALAN

I don't doubt it.

PENELOPE

That's all I've been thinking about for months...

MICHAEL

Don't get her started with this!
Please!

PENELOPE charges her husband and strikes him, several times, wild with despair and irrational abandon.

ALAN pulls her off.

ALAN

You know I'm actually starting to like you.

PENELOPE

Well I'm not!

MICHAEL

Talk about commitment to world peace and stability.

PENELOPE

Shut the fuck up!

NANCY wretches again.

She takes her glass of scotch and brings it to her lips.

MICHAEL

You sure about that?

NANCY

Very sure. This will do me some good.

PENELOPE

We live in New York City. We don't live in Kinshasa! We live in New York, with the customs of western society. What happens in the Third Street Playground is about western values! To which, like it or not, I happen to subscribe!

MICHAEL

Beating your husband must be one of those customs then...

PENELOPE

Michael, I am warning you.

ALAN

She was all over you like a bad rash! If I were you it would melt my heart.

PENELOPE

I might finish the job in a second.

NANCY

He's making fun of you, do you believe it?

PENELOPE

I couldn't care less.

ALAN

No, really. Morally, we're supposed to overcome our impulses but there are times you don't want to overcome them. I mean, who wants to say a Hail Mary while you're having sex? Can you buy this scotch around here?

MICHAEL

This one, not very likely!

NANCY

Thump gun! Ha, ha!

PENELOPE

Thump gun, really!

ALAN

Yes. Thump gun.

NANCY

Why don't you just say grenade launcher?

ALAN

Because that's the term. Just like they say "kalash" and not Kalashnikov or AK-47.

NANCY

Who is they?

ALAN

That's enough, Nancy. That's enough.

NANCY

Hotshot firebrands like my husband, you got to understand, it's hard for them to get excited about what happens down the block.

ALAN

Exactly.

PENELOPE

I don't see why. I don't see why. We're all citizens of the world. I don't see why we shouldn't also be involved on a local community basis.

MICHAEL

Oh Penny! Give us a break with the highfalutin clap trap!

PENELOPE

I'm going to kill him.

The cell vibrates.

ALAN

Yes, yes take out "barefaced".

(beat)

"Brazen". A brazen attempt to...

(beat)

There you go.

PENELOPE

She's right, it's unbearable after a while.

ALAN

But he signed off on the rest?

(beat)

Good, good. That's fine.

(hangs up)

What were we talking about? Thump guns?

PENELOPE

I was saying that, whatever my husband thinks, exercising vigilance is not limited to one particular place.

ALAN

Exercising vigilance... Yeah... Nancy, it's absurd to drink in your condition.

NANCY

What condition? I'm perfect.

ALAN

It's an interesting idea...

(picks up cell)

Yes.

(beat)

No, no interviews before we get the release out.

PENELOPE

Mr. Cowan, would you please put an end to this nerve-racking conversation?!

ALAN

(on phone:)

No way.

(MORE)

ALAN (CONT'D)

(beat)
The stockholders won't give a shit.
(beat)
Just remind him, the stockholders
have the last word.

NANCY walks to ALAN, tears his cell phone away and, after briefly looking around for where to put it, dunks it in the tulip vase.

ALAN (CONT'D)

Nancy, what are you...!!

NANCY

There.

PENELOPE

Ha, ha! Way to go!

MICHAEL

(horrified:)
Oh my god!

ALAN

Are you out of your fucking mind?
Shit!!

He rushes to the vase. MICHAEL, who has gotten there first, fishes the phone out. It's soaking wet.

MICHAEL

The blow-dryer! Where's the blow-dryer?!

He finds it and plugs it back into the socket. He immediately turns it on and points it at the cell phone.

Because of the short wire, he has to stay close to the wall.

ALAN

You should be put in a home, dear! I can't believe this! I got everything in there. It's brand new, I spent hours setting it up!

MICHAEL speaks to NANCY, over the loud noise of the blow dryer:

MICHAEL

I really don't understand you. That was an irresponsible thing to do.

ALAN

I got everything, my whole life was in there.

NANCY

His whole life!

She downs her glass of scotch. The noise continues.

MICHAEL

Hang on, maybe we'll get it running again.

ALAN

No way. It's history!

MICHAEL

I want to take out the battery and the SIM card. How do you open it?

ALAN tries, but he has no idea.

ALAN

I just got it, I don't know.

MICHAEL

Let me see.

ALAN

It's history. And they think it's funny, they think it's funny!

MICHAEL puts the blow dryer down without turning it off.

He hunkers down by the wall and easily opens the cell phone. Then he lays out the various elements on the floor in a line.

MICHAEL

There.

He picks up the blow dryer and goes back to work. PENELOPE laughs heartily.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Penelope, you could at least have the good taste not to find this funny!

PENELOPE

My husband has spent his whole afternoon drying things!

NANCY

Ha, ha, ha!

NANCY goes right ahead and pours herself another glass of scotch.

MICHAEL, who doesn't see any humor in it, is working very dilligently. ALAN has slid down on to the ground next to him, back to the wall.

The cell phone parts - battery, SIM card, cover, etc. all tremble in the warm breeze from the blow dryer.

The lighter pieces even move slightly.

MICHAEL puts them back in order.

For a moment, the only sound is that of the blow-dryer.

ALAN is completely demoralized.

They look like a couple of sad-eyed children, only one of whom is still trying to have fun.

ALAN

Forget it, man. Forget it. Nothing
can be done.

MICHAEL finally turns off the blow-dryer.

MICHAEL

Got to wait.
(after an awkward
silence:)
You want to use the phone?

ALAN shakes his head no, shrugs to say he doesn't care.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

I must say...

NANCY

What must you say, Michael?

MICHAEL

No. I don't even know what to say.

NANCY

I'd say it feels better. It feels
better like this.

(beat)

I'd say it's more peaceful, wouldn't
you? Men get so attached to their
toys. It diminishes them. They lose
their credibility. A man should have
both hands free... In my opinion.
Even briefcases. I liked this guy
once and then I saw him carrying this
rectangular bag, with a shoulder
strap. A man's bag, but with a
shoulder strap. It was over. A bag
with a shoulder strap, that's the
worst. But the cell phone always at
his fingertips is the worst, too. A
man should seem alone. In my opinion.
Seem like he can go it alone. I've
got a John Wayne idea of manhood,
too. What was it he had? A Colt '45.
Something that empties a room...

(MORE)

NANCY (CONT'D)

Any man that doesn't give off those loner vibes just doesn't come off as having any substance... So Michael I guess you're happy now. Our little - what was the word you used? I forgot - it's coming apart at the seams. But hey, you know what? It sort of almost feels good. In my opinion.

MICHAEL

I should warn you, though. Liquor can drive a person insane.

NANCY

I'm as normal as can be.

MICHAEL

Yeah, right.

NANCY

I'm beginning to see things with a pleasant serenity.

PENELOPE

Ha, ha! That's so good! A pleasant serenity!

MICHAEL

As for you darjeeling, I can't understand why you're wasting yourself, right out in the open.

PENELOPE

Shut the hell up.

MICHAEL gets up and takes a box of cigars from a corner cabinet. He comes back and holds it out to ALAN.

MICHAEL

Take one, Alan. Relax.

PENELOPE

No cigar smoke in the house!

MICHAEL

Hoyo de Monterrey, or Partagas D number 4. You got your Hoyo Coronation or Epicure number 2.

PENELOPE

You can't smoke in a house with an asthmatic child!

NANCY

Who has asthma?

PENELOPE

Our son.

MICHAEL

We had a god damn hamster, didn't we?

NANCY

It's true that pets aren't good when you're asthmatic.

MICHAEL

Not good at all!

NANCY

Even goldfish aren't necessarily recommended.

PENELOPE

Do I have to listen to this drivel?

PENELOPE tears the cigar box away from MICHAEL and slams it shut.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)

I'm sorry, I guess I'm the only one who doesn't see things with pleasant serenity. To tell you the truth, I've never been so unhappy. I think this is the unhappiest day of my whole life.

MICHAEL

You're an unhappy drunk.

PENELOPE

Michael, every word out of your mouth just slays me. I don't get drunk. I had a sip of your shitty eighteen-year old single malt... that you bring out like it's the eighth wonder of the world. I don't get drunk, and believe me I wish I could. It would be such a relief to drown every little sorrow in a good stiff drink.

NANCY

My husband is unhappy, too. Look at him. All hunched over. Like he was left on the side of the road. I think it's the unhappiest day of his life, too.

ALAN

It is.

NANCY

I'm sorry, Doodle.

MICHAEL hits the cell phone parts with the blow-dryer again.

PENELOPE

Turn that blow-dryer off! His thing
is a goner.

The COWAN family phone rings. MICHAEL picks up.

MICHAEL

Yeah!

(beat)

Mom, I told you we're busy here.

(beat)

Because it's medication that can kill
you! It's poison!

(beat)

Here, there's someone here who can
explain.

He hands the phone to ALAN.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Tell her.

ALAN

Tell her what?

MICHAEL

What you know about that deadly shit
of yours.

ALAN

How are you, Ma'am?

NANCY

What can he tell her? He doesn't know
anything!

ALAN

Yes.

(beat)

And are you in pain?

(beat)

Of course. But the operation will fix
that.

(beat)

The other leg too, huh?

(beat)

No, I'm not an orthopedist.

(aside:)

She keeps calling me doctor.

NANCY

Doctor, what a laugh! Hang up!

ALAN

But you're... I mean, you don't have
any equilibrium issues?

(beat)

No, of course not. Not at all.

(MORE)

ALAN (CONT'D)

Don't listen to what people say.
Still and all, it's probably a good
idea for you not to take it anymore
for a while. Just until... Until this
operation is behind you.

(beat)

Yes, sounds like you're in excellent
health.

MICHAEL tears the phone away.

MICHAEL

All right, Ma. You got it? Stop
taking that medication, why you got
to argue all the time? Just stop
taking it, do as you're told. I'll
call you back.

(beat)

I love you too, Ma. Bye now.

(hangs up)

I can't take her anymore. The shit
you put up with in life!

NANCY

All right, should we wrap this up?
Should I come back tonight with
Zachary? Let's decide. This is
getting to be like, who cares? That
is what we're here for, after all.

PENELOPE

Now I'm going to be sick. Where's the
bucket?

MICHAEL takes the bottle of scotch and puts it out of
NANCY's reach.

MICHAEL

That's enough.

NANCY

I'd say both sides share the blame.
So there you are. Both sides share
the blame.

PENELOPE

What, you're serious?

NANCY

Excuse me?

PENELOPE

Is that what you really think?

NANCY

It's what I think, yes.

PENELOPE
 Our son Ethan, who took two codeine
 Tylenols last night at three in the
 morning, shares the blame?

NANCY
 He's not necessarily innocent.

PENELOPE
 Get the fuck out! Get out of my
 house.

She grabs NANCY's handbag and throws it against the door.
 All the contents spill out.

PENELOPE (CONT'D)
 Get the fuck out!

NANCY
 My bag!
 (like a little girl:)
 Alan!

MICHAEL
 What is going on here? They've
 totally lost it.

NANCY picks up the items that have fallen from her bag.

NANCY
 Alan, do something!

PENELOPE
 "Alan, do something!"

NANCY
 Shut your mouth! She broke my make-up
 mirror! And my perfume!
 (to ALAN:)
 Stand up for me. Why don't you stand
 up for me?

ALAN
 Let's go.

He starts picking up the pieces of his cell phone.

PENELOPE
 It's not like I'm strangling her!

NANCY
 What did I do to you?!

PENELOPE
 The blame is not shared! The victim
 and the criminal are not the same!

NANCY

The criminal!

MICHAEL

Oh give it a fucking rest, Penelope!
Enough of this simplistic prattle!

PENELOPE

Which I believe in.

MICHAEL

Yeah, you believe, you believe. This
crush you got on these Sudan niggers
is spilling over into everything now!

PENELOPE

I am horrified. How can you be so
openly despicable?

MICHAEL

Because I feel like it. I feel like
being openly despicable.

PENELOPE

One day you'll understand the sheer
horror of what's happening in that
part of the world and you'll be
ashamed of your inability to take
action, of your contemptibly
nihilistic attitude.

MICHAEL

Yes, darjeeling, you're so wonderful!
You are the best and the brightest
among us!

PENELOPE

Yes. Yes.

NANCY

Let's get out of here, Alan. These
people are monsters!

NANCY drinks down the rest of her scotch and goes for the
bottle. ALAN stops her.

ALAN

Stop it, Nancy.

NANCY

No, I want to drink some more. I want
to get drunk off my ass. This bitch
throws my bag against a wall and
nobody lifts a finger. I want to be
blind drunk!

ALAN

You're drunk enough.

NANCY

How can you let her call our son a criminal? We come to their house to work things out with them and they insult us, browbeat us, they lecture us about being good citizens of the planet. I'm glad our son kicked the shit out of your son and I wipe my ass with your human rights!

MICHAEL

A little booze and wow! We see her true self. What happened to that gracious, demure woman with the soft eyes...

PENELOPE

I told you! I told you!

ALAN

What did you tell him?

PENELOPE

That she was fake. This woman is totally fake. I'm sorry.

NANCY

(in distress:)
Ha, ha, ha!

ALAN

When exactly did you say that?

PENELOPE

When you were in the bathroom.

ALAN

You had known her fifteen minutes and you already knew she was fake?

PENELOPE

I pick up on these things in people very quickly.

MICHAEL

She does.

PENELOPE

I just have a nose for it.

ALAN

Fake, what does that mean?

NANCY

I don't want to listen to this! Why do you put me through this, Alan!?

ALAN

Relax, Doodle.

PENELOPE

She fudges everything. Period. For all her manners, she doesn't care any more than you do.

MICHAEL

It's true.

ALAN

It's true.

PENELOPE

It's true! You're saying it's true?

MICHAEL

They don't give a shit! It's so obvious, right from the beginning, they don't give a shit! She doesn't give a shit either, you're right!

ALAN

Like you do?

(to NANCY:)

Let him talk, honey. Explain to me, Michael, exactly how you care. What does that mean anyway? You're more credible when you're being openly despicable. Truth is, nobody here cares. Except Penelope, one must acknowledge her integrity.

PENELOPE

I don't need your acknowledgment! I don't need your acknowledgment!

NANCY

But I do care. I really do care.

ALAN

We care in a hysterical way, Nancy. Not like heroic figures of a social movement.

(to PENELOPE:)

I saw your friend Jane Fonda on TV the other day. Made me want to run out and buy a Ku Klux Klan poster.

PENELOPE

My friend Jane Fonda? What the hell does she have to do with this?!

ALAN

You're the same breed. You're the same kind of involved, problem-solver woman.

(MORE)

ALAN (CONT'D)

Those are not the women we like, the women we like are sensual, crazy, shot full of hormones. The ones who want to show off how perceptive they are, the gatekeepers of the world, they're a big turnoff. Even poor Michael, your own husband is turned off...

MICHAEL

Don't you speak for me!

PENELOPE

We don't give a shit about what you like in a woman! Where do you get off spouting these opinions? You're one man whose opinion we don't give a shit about!

ALAN

She's screaming. A quartermaster on a slave ship!

PENELOPE

What about her? She doesn't scream? She didn't just scream that your little asshole was right to beat up ours?

NANCY

He was right! At least our kid isn't a little wimpy-ass faggot!

PENELOPE

Yours is a snitch, that's supposed to be better?

NANCY

(picking up her coat:)

Let's go Alan! Why are we still in this house?

She starts toward the door but then crosses back to the tulips and whacks them with her handbag.

The flowers go flying all over the place, in pieces.

NANCY (CONT'D)

Here! Here! This is what I think of your stupid flowers, your hideous tulips! Ha, ha, ha!

She breaks down crying.

NANCY (CONT'D)

This is the worst day of my life, too.

Silence.

A long moment of stupor.

ALAN leans over and starts picking up the stems and the petals.

MICHAEL picks up a glasses case fallen out of the bag, and hands it to NANCY without a word.

22

EXT. PARK AND PLAYGROUND - DAY

22

At the foot of an oak tree, CLOSE on a hamster.

He is shaking himself out on the ground, where leaves and roots from the tree are all tangled together. The very happy hamster nibbles on an acorn.

WE MOVE UP revealing the same playground as the opening scene of the film.

In the distance, the same group of children who had been in the fight.

They are all playing together happily.

END CREDITS