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GOD OF CARNAGE

By Yasmina Reza
Translated by Christopher Hampton

|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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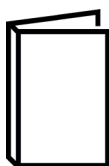
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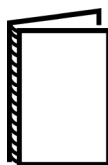


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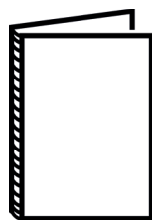
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Christopher Hampton became involved in theatre while studying French and German at Oxford University, and wrote a play in his first year. The Royal Court's production was so successful that it transferred to the Comedy Theatre while he was still a student, making him the youngest writer ever to have a play performed in the West End – a record which still stands. He said at the time that he also hoped to become the oldest writer to have a play in the West End, an ambition he has yet to achieve.

His plays, musicals and translations have so far garnered four Tony Awards, three Olivier Awards, five Evening Standard Awards and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award; prizes for his film and television work include an Oscar, two BAFTAs, a Writers' Guild of America Award, the Prix Italia, a Special Jury Award at the Cannes Film Festival, Hollywood Screenwriter of the Year, and The Collateral Award at the Venice Film Festival for Best Literary Adaptation.

His works for the stage include original plays (*Appomattox*, *The Talking Cure*, *White Chameleon*, *Tales from Hollywood*, *Treats*, *Savages*, *The Philanthropist*, *Total Eclipse* and *When Did You Last See My Mother?*); plays adapted from novels (Ödön von Horváth's *Youth Without God*, Sándor Márai's *Embers*, Laclos' *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, George Steiner's novella *The Portage to San Cristobal of A.H.*); musicals (*Sunset Boulevard*, *Dracula: The Musical* and, most recently, *Stephen Ward*, all with Don Black); libretti (*Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Appomattox* and *The Trial*, all with composer Philip Glass); and many translations (plays by Chekhov, Ibsen, Molière, Horváth, Yasmina Reza, Daniel Kehlmann and Florian Zeller; and a German musical based on Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*).

Hampton's screenplays include most recently *Ali and Nino* (based on the novel by Kurban Said), *Adore* (based on Doris Lessing's *The Grandmothers*), *A Dangerous Method* (based on his play *The Talking Cure*), *Chéri* (from the novel by Colette), *Atonement* (from the novel by Ian McEwan), *Imagining Argentina* (which he also directed), *The Quiet American* (from the Graham Greene novel), *The Secret Agent* (from Joseph Conrad's novel, and which he also directed), *Mary Reilly* (from Valerie Martin's novel inspired by Robert Louis Stevenson's *Jekyll and Hyde*), *Total Eclipse* (from his play of the same name, and in which he also performed), *Carrington* (the first film he also directed), *Dangerous Liaisons* (based on his play *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*), *The Good Father* (from the novel by Peter Prince), *The Honorary Consul* (from Graham Greene's novel), *Tales from the Vienna Woods* (from the von Horváth play) and *A Doll's House* (based on his translation of the play by Ibsen).

His television scripts include mini-series *The Ginger Tree* (from the novel by Oswald Wynd), *Hôtel Du Lac* (from the Anita Brookner novel), *The History Man* (from Malcolm Bradbury's novel), *Able's Will* and most recently *The Thirteenth Tale* starring Vanessa Redgrave and Olivia Colman, based on the novel by Diane Setterfield.

Upcoming plays in 2018 include *Tartuffe* in the West End and *The Height of the Storm* at Wyndham's Theatre, London. *The Height of the Storm* is the fifth Florian Zeller play Hampton has translated, following *The Mother*, *The Father*, *The Truth* and *The Lie*.

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GOD OF CARNAGE

God of Carnage was first presented at the Gielgud Theatre, London, on 8 March 2008. The cast was as follows:

ALAIN REILLE

ANNETTE REILLE

VÉRONIQUE VALLON

MICHEL VALLON

Ralph Fiennes

Tamsin Greig

Janet McTeer

Ken Stott

Director Matthew Warchus

Designer Mark Thompson

Lighting Designer Hugh Vanstone

Music Gary Yershon

Sound Simon Baker

Producers David Pugh and Dafydd Rogers

CHARACTERS

VÉRONIQUE VALLON

MICHEL VALLON

ANNETTE REILLE

ALAIN REILLE

All are in their forties

*A living room. No realism.
Nothing superfluous.*

The VALLONS and the REILLES, sitting down, facing one another. We need to sense right away that the place belongs to the VALLONS and that the two couples have just met.

In the centre, a coffee table, covered with art books. Two big bunches of tulips in vases.

The prevailing mood is serious, friendly and tolerant.

VÉRONIQUE So, this is our statement – you’ll be doing your own, of course... ‘At 5.30 p.m. on the 3rd November, in Aspirant Dunant Gardens, following a verbal altercation, Ferdinand Reille, eleven, armed with a stick, struck our son, Bruno Vallon, in the face. This action resulted in, apart from a swelling of the upper lip, the breaking of two incisors, including injury to the nerve in the right incisor.’

ALAIN Armed?

VÉRONIQUE Armed? You don’t like ‘armed’ – what shall we say, Michel, furnished, equipped, furnished with a stick, is that all right?

ALAIN Furnished, yes.

MICHEL ‘Furnished with a stick’.

VÉRONIQUE (*making the correction*) Furnished. The irony is, we’ve always regarded Aspirant Dunant Gardens as a haven of security, unlike the Montsouris Park.

MICHEL She’s right. We’ve always said the Montsouris Park no, Aspirant Dunant Gardens yes.

VÉRONIQUE Absolutely. Anyway, thank you for coming. There’s nothing to be gained from getting stuck down some emotional cul-de-sac.

ANNETTE We should be thanking you. We should.

VÉRONIQUE I don't see that any thanks are necessary. Fortunately, there is still such a thing as the art of co-existence, is there not?

ALAIN Which the children don't appear to have mastered. At least, not ours!

ANNETTE Yes, not ours! ...What's going to happen to the tooth with the affected nerve? ...

VÉRONIQUE We don't know yet. They're being cautious about the prognosis. Apparently the nerve hasn't been totally exposed.

MICHEL Only a bit of it's been exposed.

VÉRONIQUE 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.

MICHEL They're trying to give the tooth a chance.

VÉRONIQUE Obviously it would be best to avoid endodontic surgery.

ANNETTE Well, yes...

VÉRONIQUE So there'll be an interim period while they give the nerve a chance to recover.

MICHEL In the meantime, they'll be giving him ceramic crowns.

VÉRONIQUE Whatever happens, you can't have an implant before you're eighteen.

MICHEL No.

VÉRONIQUE Permanent implants can't be fitted until you finish growing.

ANNETTE Of course. I hope... I do hope it all works out.

VÉRONIQUE Let's hope so.

Slight hiatus.

ANNETTE Those tulips are gorgeous.

VÉRONIQUE It's that little florist's in the Mouton-Duvernet Market. You know, the one right up the top.

ANNETTE Oh, yes.

VÉRONIQUE They come every morning direct from Holland, ten euros for a bunch of fifty.

ANNETTE Oh, really!

VÉRONIQUE You know, the one right up the top.

ANNETTE Yes, yes.

VÉRONIQUE You know he didn't want to identify Ferdinand.

MICHEL No, he didn't.

VÉRONIQUE Impressive sight, that child, face bashed in, teeth missing, still refusing to talk.

ANNETTE I can imagine.

MICHEL He also didn't want to identify him for fear of looking like a sneak in front of his friends; we have to be honest, Véronique, it was nothing more than bravado.

VÉRONIQUE 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 find out Ferdinand's name? ...

VÉRONIQUE Well, we explained to Bruno he wasn't helping this child by shielding him.

MICHEL We said to him if this child thinks he can go on hitting people with impunity, why should he stop?

VÉRONIQUE We said to him, if we were this boy's parents, we would definitely want to be told.

ANNETTE Absolutely.

ALAIN Yes...

His mobile vibrates.

Excuse me...

He moves away from the group; as he talks, he pulls a newspaper out of his pocket.

...Yes, Maurice, thanks for calling back. Right, in today's *Le Monde*, let me read it to you... 'According to a paper published in the *Lancet* and taken up yesterday in the *FT*, two Australian researchers have revealed the neurological side-effects of Antril, a hypertensive beta-blocker, manufactured at the Verenz-Pharma laboratories. These side-effects range from hearing loss to ataxia...' So who the hell is your media watchdog? ...Yes, it's very bloody inconvenient... No, what's most inconvenient about it as far as I'm concerned is the AGM's in two weeks. Do you have an insurance contingency to cover litigation? ...OK ...Oh, and Maurice, Maurice, ask your DOC to find out if this story shows up anywhere else... Call me back.

He hangs up.

...Excuse me.

MICHEL So you're...

ALAIN A lawyer.

ANNETTE What about you?

MICHEL Me, I have a wholesale company, household goods, and Véronique's a writer and works part-time in an art-history bookshop.

ANNETTE A writer?

VÉRONIQUE I contributed to a collection on the civilisation 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 specialise in Africa.

VÉRONIQUE I'm very interested in that part of the world.

ANNETTE Do you have any other children?

VÉRONIQUE Bruno has a nine-year-old sister, Camille. Who's furious with her father because last night her father got rid of the hamster.

ANNETTE You got rid of the hamster?

MICHEL Yes. That hamster made the most appalling racket all night. Then it spent the whole day fast asleep. Bruno was in a very bad way, he was driven crazy by the noise that hamster made. As for me, to tell you the truth, I've been wanting to get rid of it for ages, so I said to myself, right, that's it. I took it and put it out in the street. I thought they loved drains and gutters and so on, but not a bit of it, it just sat there paralysed on the pavement. Well, they're not domestic animals, they're not wild animals, I don't know where their natural habitat is. Dump them in the woods, they're probably just as unhappy. I don't know where you're meant to put them.

ANNETTE You left it outside?

VÉRONIQUE He left it there and tried to convince Camille it had run away. But she wasn't having it.

ALAIN And had the hamster vanished this morning?

MICHEL Vanished.

VÉRONIQUE And you, what field are you in?

ANNETTE I'm in wealth management.

VÉRONIQUE Is it at all possible – forgive me for putting the question so bluntly – that Ferdinand might apologise to Bruno?

ALAIN It'd be good if they talked.

ANNETTE He has to apologise, Alain. He has to tell him he's sorry.

ALAIN Yes, yes. Of course.

VÉRONIQUE But is he sorry?

ALAIN He realises what he's done. He just doesn't understand the implications. He's eleven.

VÉRONIQUE If you're eleven, you're not a baby any more.

MICHEL You're not an adult either! We haven't offered you anything – coffee, tea, is there any of that clafoutis left, Ronnie? It's an extraordinary clafoutis!

ALAIN I wouldn't mind an espresso.

ANNETTE Just some water.

MICHEL (*to VÉRONIQUE, on her way out*) Espresso for me too, darling, and bring the clafoutis 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.

MICHEL You have to taste the clafoutis. Good clafoutis is an endangered species.

ANNETTE You're right.

ALAIN What is it you sell?

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

ALAIN Money in that, is there?

MICHEL Well, you know, it's never exactly been a bonanza, it was pretty hard when we started. But provided I'm out there every day pushing my product, it rubs along. At least it's not seasonal, like textiles. Although we do sell a lot of foie gras pots in the run-up to Christmas!

ALAIN I'm sure...

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

MICHEL Because I couldn't pick it up.

ANNETTE You put it on the pavement.

MICHEL I took it out in its cage and sort of tipped it out. I just can't touch rodents.

VÉRONIQUE *comes back with a tray. Drinks and the clafoutis.*

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

ALAIN No, thanks. What's in the clafoutis?

VÉRONIQUE Apples and pears.

ANNETTE Apples and pears?

VÉRONIQUE My own little recipe.

She cuts the clafoutis and distributes slices.

It's going to be too cold, shame.

ANNETTE Apples and pears, this is a first.

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

ANNETTE There is?

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

ANNETTE Ah, of course.

MICHEL But she's not telling you the real secret.

VÉRONIQUE Let them try it.

ALAIN Very good. It's very good.

ANNETTE Tasty.

VÉRONIQUE ...Gingerbread crumbs!

ANNETTE Brilliant!

VÉRONIQUE It's a version of the way they make clafoutis in Picardy. To be quite honest, I got it from his mother.

ALAIN Gingerbread, delicious... Well, at least all this has given us a new recipe.

VÉRONIQUE I'd have preferred it if it hadn't cost my son two teeth.

ALAIN Of course, that's what I meant.

ANNETTE Strange way of expressing it.

ALAIN Not at all, I...

His mobile vibrates, he looks at the screen.

I have to take this... Yes, Maurice... No, no, don't ask for right of reply, you'll only feed the controversy... Are you insured? ...Mm, mm... What are these symptoms, what is ataxia? ...What about on a standard dose? ...How long have you known about this? ...And all that time you never recalled it? ...What's the turnover? ...Ah, yes. I see... Right.

He hangs up and immediately dials another number, scoffing clafoutis all the while.

ANNETTE Alain, do you mind joining us?

ALAIN Yes, yes, I'm coming... (*To the mobile*) Serge? ...They've known about the risks for two years... An internal report, but it didn't formally identify any undesirable side-effects... No, they took no precautions, they didn't insure, not a word about it in the annual report... Impaired motor skills, stability problems, in short you look permanently pissed... (*He laughs along with his colleague*) ...Turnover, a hundred and fifty million dollars... Blanket denial... Idiot wanted to demand a right of reply. We certainly don't want a right of reply – on the other hand if the story spreads we could put out a press release, say it's disinformation put about two weeks before the AGM... He's going to call me back... OK.

He hangs up.

Actually I hardly had any lunch.

MICHEL Help yourself, help yourself.

ALAIN Thanks. I'm incorrigible. What were we saying?

VÉRONIQUE That it would have been nicer to meet under different circumstances.

ALAIN Oh, yes, right.

So the clafoutis, it's your mother's?

MICHEL The recipe is my mother's, but Ronnie made this one.

VÉRONIQUE Your mother doesn't mix pears and apples!

MICHEL No.

VÉRONIQUE Poor thing has to have an operation.

ANNETTE Really? What for?

VÉRONIQUE Her knee.

MICHEL They're going to insert a rotatable prosthesis made of metal and polyethylene. She's wondering what's going to be left of it when she's cremated.

VÉRONIQUE Don't be horrible.

MICHEL She refuses to be buried next to my father. She wants to be cremated and put next to her mother who's all on her own down south. Two urns, looking out to sea, trying to get a word in edgeways. Ha, ha! ...

Smiles all round. Hiatus.

ANNETTE We're very touched by your generosity. We appreciate the fact you're trying to calm the situation down rather than exacerbate it.

VÉRONIQUE Frankly, it's the least we can do.

MICHEL Yes!

ANNETTE Not at all. How many parents standing up for their children become infantile themselves? If Bruno had broken two of Ferdinand's teeth, I'm afraid Alain and I would have been a good deal more thin-skinned about it. I'm not certain we'd have been so broad-minded.

MICHEL Course you would!

ALAIN She's right. By no means certain.

MICHEL Oh, yes. Because we all know very well it might easily have been the other way round.

Hiatus.

VÉRONIQUE So what does Ferdinand have to say about it? How does he view the situation?

ANNETTE He's not saying much. I think he's still slightly in shock.

VÉRONIQUE He understands that he's disfigured his playmate?

ALAIN No. No, he does not understand that he's disfigured his playmate.

ANNETTE Why are you saying that? Ferdinand understands very well!

ALAIN He understands he's behaved like a thug, he does not understand that he's disfigured his playmate.

VÉRONIQUE You don't care for the word, but the word is unfortunately accurate.

ALAIN My son has not disfigured your son.

VÉRONIQUE Your son has disfigured my son. Come back at five and have a look at his mouth and teeth.

MICHEL Temporarily disfigured.

ALAIN The swelling on his lip will go down, and as for his teeth, take him to the best dentist – I'm prepared to chip in...

MICHEL That's what the insurance is for. What we'd like is for the boys to make up so that this sort of thing never happens again.

ANNETTE Let's arrange a meeting.

MICHEL Yes. That's the answer.

VÉRONIQUE Should we be there?

ALAIN They don't need to be coached. Just let them do it man to man.

ANNETTE Man to man? Alain, don't be ridiculous. Having said that, we don't necessarily have to be there. It'd probably be better if we weren't, wouldn't it?

VÉRONIQUE The question isn't whether we should be there or not. The question is, do they want to talk to one another, do they want to have a reckoning?

MICHEL Bruno wants to.

VÉRONIQUE What about Ferdinand?

ANNETTE It's no use asking his opinion.

VÉRONIQUE But it has to come from him.

ANNETTE Ferdinand has behaved like a hooligan, we're not interested in what mood he's in.

VÉRONIQUE If Ferdinand is forced to meet Bruno in a punitive context, I can't see the results would be very positive.

ALAIN Madame, our son is a savage. To hope for any kind of spontaneous repentance would be fanciful. Right, I'm sorry, I have to get back to the office. You stay, Annette, you'll tell me what you've decided, I'm no use whichever way you cut it. Women always think you need a man, you need a father, as if they'd be the slightest use. Men are a dead weight, they're clumsy and maladjusted – oh, you can see a stretch of the overground metro, that's great!

ANNETTE I'm really embarrassed, but I can't stay either... My husband has never exactly been a pushchair father!

VÉRONIQUE What a pity. It's lovely, taking the baby for a walk. And it lasts such a short time. You always enjoyed taking care of the children, didn't you, Michel? You loved pushing the pushchair.

MICHEL Yes, I did.

VÉRONIQUE So what have we decided?

ANNETTE Could you come by the house with Bruno about seven-thirty?

VÉRONIQUE Seven-thirty? ...What do you think, Michel?

MICHEL Well... If I may...

ANNETTE Go on.

MICHEL I rather think Ferdinand ought to come here.

VÉRONIQUE Yes, I agree.

MICHEL I don't think it's for the victim to go traipsing around.

VÉRONIQUE That's right.

ALAIN Personally, I can't be anywhere at seven-thirty.

ANNETTE Since you're no use, we won't be needing you.

VÉRONIQUE All the same, it would be better if his father were here.

ALAIN's mobile vibrates.

ALAIN All right, but then it can't be this evening. Hello? ... There's no mention of this in the executive report. And no risk has been formally established. There's no evidence...

He hangs up.

VÉRONIQUE Tomorrow?

ALAIN I'm in The Hague tomorrow.

VÉRONIQUE You're working in The Hague?

ALAIN I have a case at the International Criminal Court.

ANNETTE The main thing is that the children speak to one another. I'll bring Ferdinand here at seven-thirty and we can leave them to have their reckoning. No? You don't look very convinced.

VÉRONIQUE If Ferdinand is not made aware of his responsibilities, they'll just look at each other like a pair of china dogs, it'll be a catastrophe.

ALAIN What do you mean, madame? What do you mean, ‘made aware of his responsibilities’?

VÉRONIQUE I’m sure your son is not a savage.

ANNETTE Of course Ferdinand isn’t a savage.

ALAIN Yes, he is.

ANNETTE Alain, this is absurd, why say something like that?

ALAIN He’s a savage.

MICHEL How does he explain his behaviour?

ANNETTE He doesn’t want to discuss it.

VÉRONIQUE But he ought to discuss it.

ALAIN He ought to do any number of things, madame. He ought to come here, he ought to discuss it, he ought to be sorry for it, clearly you have parenting skills that put us to shame, we hope to improve, but in the meantime, please bear with us.

MICHEL Now, now! This is idiotic. Don’t let’s end up like this!

VÉRONIQUE I’m only thinking of him, I’m only thinking of Ferdinand.

ALAIN I got the message.

ANNETTE Let’s just sit down for another couple of minutes.

MICHEL Another drop of coffee?

ALAIN A coffee, OK.

ANNETTE Then I’ll have one too. Thanks.

MICHEL That’s all right, Ronnie, I’ll do it.

Hiatus. ANNETTE delicately shuffles some of the numerous art books dispersed around the coffee table.

ANNETTE I see you’re a great art lover.

VÉRONIQUE Art. Photographs. To some extent it’s my job.

ANNETTE I adore Bacon.

VÉRONIQUE Ah, yes, Bacon.

ANNETTE (*turning the pages*) ...Cruelty. Majesty.

VÉRONIQUE Chaos. Balance.

ANNETTE That's right...

VÉRONIQUE Is Ferdinand interested in art?

ANNETTE Not as much as he should be... What about your children?

VÉRONIQUE We try. We try to fill the gaps in the educational system.

ANNETTE Yes...

VÉRONIQUE We try to make them read. To take them to concerts and exhibitions. We're eccentric enough to believe in the pacifying abilities of culture!

ANNETTE And you're right...

MICHEL *comes back with the coffee.*

MICHEL Clafoutis, is it a cake or a tart? Serious question. I was just thinking in the kitchen – Linzertorte, for example, is that a tart? Come on, come on, you can't leave that one little slice.

VÉRONIQUE Clafoutis is a cake. The pastry's not rolled out, it's mixed in with the fruit.

ALAIN You really are a cook.

VÉRONIQUE I love it. The thing about cooking is you have to love it. In my view, it's only the classic tart, that's to say on a pastry base, that deserves to be called a tart.

MICHEL What about you, do you have other children?

ALAIN A son from my first marriage.

MICHEL I was wondering, not that it's at all important, what started the quarrel. Bruno won't say a blind word about it.

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