

PLAYING GOD

A Ten Minute Play

By
Stuart Caldwell

160 W. 16th Street
Apt. 3G
New York, NY 10011
(212) 627-5343

© 2003

A standard, cramped studio apartment: bookshelves, chairs, stereo. We hear the sound of a respirator and a EKG machine beating out the data of someone's life. These sounds grow faint as the actors enter, but are perceptible throughout the play, increasing in their pace. MICHAEL enters the apartment in a hurry, initially waiting by the door, but eventually leaving the door open for LAURA who follows. MICHAEL throws off his jacket, moves to his file cabinet, and pours through it anxiously. LAURA enters desultorily, removes her jacket and slowly takes up a chair. There is a long moment's pause before she speaks.

LAURA

All I'm saying is....is that you might want to think about.

MICHAEL

No, I don't. I don't want to think.

LAURA

Yes I know—but maybe you should.

MICHAEL

That was the point. *Not* to think about it. To take it out of my hands.

LAURA

But it *is* in your hands.

MICHAEL

Well I didn't put it there....I have it. I know I have it somewhere.

(pause as he searches)

LAURA

It's in your hands now and you don't have to do this. I mean you have discretion.

MICHAEL

I haven't seen it in years, but I have it. I know....

LAURA

You have the option. Even if you find it, you don't have to. You can just have it. For later. If it becomes necessary. When it becomes necessary.

MICHAEL

This thing's so *fucking* disorganized! I can never find anything.

LAURA

Because we're not certain. It's never certain.

MICHAEL

How many times have I said I'm gonna clean this thing?

LAURA

Things happen. Amazing, wonderful unexplainable things—

MICHAEL

“Next weekend, next weekend I'll do it.” *Christ!*

LAURA

They can always happen. They can happen and change everything.

MICHAEL

Shit!

(he slams the drawer shut and pauses, thinking)

LAURA

Michael....

MICHAEL

Maybe it's in the Paper Blob.

LAURA

It's not in the Paper Blob.

MICHAEL

I'm going in.

LAURA

It's *not* in the Paper Blob! It started after she sent it to you!

(he moves to a foot-high pile of papers tucked in a corner and takes half onto his lap and begins shuffling through them)

LAURA

After the first time, after the first attack. Don't you remember?

(he ignores her, searching a long moment, eventually pulling a page out and placing besides him)

MICHAEL

Did I pay that?

LAURA

Your mother's a strong woman Michael.

MICHAEL

Fucking city. I've probably paid it three times already, but they keep sending me these.

LAURA

She always been very strong, very resilient.

MICHAEL

Nobody ever remembers. They don't send you a paid receipt or notice of payment and you just keep on paying.

LAURA

She's recovered before.

MICHAEL

Sixty bucks each time.

LAURA

She's always recovered before.

MICHAEL

It was never like this.

LAURA

I know.

MICHAEL

She was never like this.

LAURA

I know!....It just seems like you're playing God or something. Like you're making choices you shouldn't be allowed to make.

MICHAEL

I'm not.

LAURA

It doesn't seem right. As if it shouldn't be this way, as if something else....Does it seem right to you?

MICHAEL

It doesn't matter what I think.

LAURA

What do you mean it doesn't matter?! It has to matter! Because this is it. This is, there's no going back. And once you've done it, once you have....

(as his well-timed response, he puts the first half on the floor as papers scatter somewhat and moves to the second half of the pile. She watches him as he searches)

LAURA

It's it. It is.

(he ignores her for a long moment, then flicks a piece of paper away, a la Letterman)

MICHAEL

Ernie and Andrew's wedding invitation. *That* was an interesting one.

LAURA

It's irrevocable. It's final.

MICHAEL

The groom was male, the bride was male. The bridesmaids were male. The maid of honor, the ring bearer—

LAURA

If you change your mind the next day or next week....

MICHAEL

Would not've wanted to be a heterosexual male without a date there.

LAURA

Or next month or the month after that. In the spring, in May—

MICHAEL

STOP!

LAURA

It's too late! It's too late and you can't go back!

(he pauses searching then begins again by pulling out a bill)

MICHAEL

I need that. Don't let me lose that.

LAURA

You can't ever go back.

MICHAEL

I want to submit that as a T&E.

LAURA

I don't like that finality. That irrevocability.

MICHAEL

Hope they'll still pay me.

LAURA

It's an end that you can't ever come back from....Michael I don't think you should do this.

MICHAEL

It's not here.

LAURA

I don't think you should do this Michael, I don't!

MICHAEL

(finishing with the second half, putting the pile aside)

It's not here! *Fuck!*

LAURA

It's wrong!

(he pauses to look at her, then thinks)

MICHAEL

The book shelf?

(he moves to search a book shelf)

LAURA

It's wrong and maybe this is fate. This is fate weighing in because it's wrong.

MICHAEL

You don't believe in fate.

LAURA

I know, but it's wrong and what else is there?

MICHAEL

How can two people have so much crap in such a small apartment?

LAURA

Maybe it's God!

MICHAEL

You don't believe in God.

LAURA

I KNOW!....I know but still.

MICHAEL

Why don't you throw out this B-school crap?

LAURA

It's against nature. Let nature take its course.

(he pulls out a book and throwing it on the floor)

MICHAEL

You didn't even read that for the final.

LAURA

Nature works Michael. It works! It will do what needs to be done. In time, in its own time!

MICHAEL

I got a B+ in that class. You had Whitehall, he was easier.

LAURA

Because it's not over before then. It's not! We hope—

MICHAEL

Where the *fuck* did I put it?!

LAURA

We have a right to that. We all have to have hope.

MICHAEL

There isn't any.

LAURA

There never isn't *any!* There's always some! You always have to have some. Even if it's beyond hope. Even if it's beyond miracles!

MICHAEL

Goddamn it!

LAURA

You want one! You still want one! And your wanting is hope. Your wishing, your praying is hope. You do it still. We all do it still!

MICHAEL

(finishing with the bookshelf)

That's just distraction.

LAURA

No, it's not! Because who wants to live in that case! We would all want to end it! And I couldn't, I couldn't live in that kind of world. I couldn't live—

MICHAEL

Oh oh oh! Of course!

(he rushes to an album crate and searches)

LAURA

I couldn't live thinking there's no hope left.

MICHAEL

I know where it is.

LAURA

That there will be a time of no hope, no possibility—

MICHAEL

I put it here so I wouldn't lose it—

LAURA

When it's so assured, when it's all so solved and determined and there's no chance—

MICHAEL

Where the *hell* is it?!

LAURA

Because I don't want that! I don't want that! I don't want that to be me! To be my—

MICHAEL

Ah hah hah!

(he pulls out "Born to Run," reaches inside the jacket and pulls out a typed document. He looks through the pages)

LAURA

That could be me! Don't you understand, that could be me! Michael, that could be me there like that! And I don't want that!

MICHAEL

I've got it.

LAURA

That could be me and I don't want that! I don't want that and she could've too! She could've not wanted that too! In the end! In the last moments, the last thoughts, she could've changed her mind! She might've changed her mind!—

MICHAEL

We've gotta go.

LAURA

Her mind Michael! Michael, her mind!

MICHAEL

(he folds the papers and goes for his jacket)

The doctor's waiting.

LAURA

Please, please Michael please, she might have—

MICHAEL

NO!....It was her choice....I won't take that from her.

(LAURA weeps quietly. MICHAEL puts on his jacket, readies to leave. He stops and looks at her a moment)

MICHAEL

Are you coming?....Laura?

(he goes to her, touches her shoulder, she crumbles slightly under his touch. After a moment, she breathes deep, lets out one pained sound and rises slowly. Then in silence, she puts on her coat and they leave the apartment. There is a long pause save for the sound of the respirator and EKG. Both beat out for ten seconds. The respirator stops and the EKG flat lines. All that is left is the single note buzz of the EKG)

Fade to Black