THE MICHAELSON MODEL

a ten-minute play

by

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SYNOPSIS:
When Mr. Dryser tries to educate Logan in the way of the American classroom, will the student become the teacher?

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CHARACTERS

FRED  male, 40’s-60’s. A veteran teacher.


NOTE: Like teachers do, both of these people are capable of charming someone to death, by tai chi-ing and twisting even the most serious of things into a joke. This “charm-and-joke” version of shock-and-awe can be used as both a defense and as a weapon. In fact, maybe it is the only way to survive.

TIME AND PLACE

An American classroom of the present.
SETTING: (High school classroom. FRED—a veteran teacher—sits at his desk, working on a computer. He wears glasses and looks over the tops of his lenses at his computer screen. After a moment, LOGAN—a first year teacher—pops his head in at the door. He is on his way out of the building: jacket, bag, and smart phone in hand.)

LOGAN

Burning the candle at both ends?

FRED

Just the person I wanted to see.

LOGAN

Be still my beating heart.

FRED

Come in here, kid.

LOGAN

Just popping in to say, “Have a nice afternoon.”

FRED

These Student Growth Objectives are killing me—you know how to do this, right?

LOGAN

The S.G.O.’s were due by lunch.

FRED

(Charming, a joke.)

Yeah, well, some of us teach for a living.

LOGAN

You are working with a basic spreadsheet?

FRED

I used to total it up by hand and make a table in a Word document.

LOGAN

A Word document? Jeez. Do they even make those anymore?

FRED

Everybody swears this will save me a couple of hours.

LOGAN

Oh, minimum.
FRED
The way this totals things up automatically, it makes me nervous. I don’t even really know what it’s doing.

LOGAN
You want me to take a look?

FRED
I signed on for coffee, summers off, not this crap.

LOGAN
You’re using the one administration emailed out, right?

Trying to.

LOGAN
(Indicating Fred’s chair, “sit?”)
Can I…?

FRED
(Giving up his chair.)
Oh, sure, sure.

LOGAN
(Sort of to himself, while he looks over Fred’s work.)
Okay. Looks like you’ve got your data columns here. Automatically breaks your students down into your three achievement groups—right, okay—low, medium, high—okay. It sorts the data—

“Data.” Ha, ha. When I started, you know what we used to call “data”? “Grades.” Ha, ha. “Grades.” Those were the days.

LOGAN
Yeah, right? This all looks good so far…Wow.

What?

LOGAN
Every one of your students hit their goal. How’d you manage that?

FRED
Good teaching?
LOGAN

Every single one?

FRED

Excellent teaching?

(Silence. Fred gives Logan a look.)

Are you trying to ask me if they are real? It’s okay. You can ask me. “Mr. Dryser, are these S.G.O.’s real?” No. They are not real. I made them up. The only way I could get the kids to score like that would be if I gave them the answers.

LOGAN

But what if somebody questions it?

FRED

I have hard copies. I’m not an idiot. I have something they wrote their own names on. Just in case push comes to shove, but.

LOGAN

I can’t believe you’re faking their scores.

FRED

When you say it like that, it sounds bad. Hey, listen, if my kid—my own child—has a teacher that is not intelligent enough to figure out how to do this, then maybe that’s not a person I want teaching my kid. You know what I mean? Who is gonna be dumb enough to put in some student growth numbers that are not gonna one hundred percent guarantee them a Highly Effective rating?

LOGAN

I’m just surprised, I guess.

FRED

Smoke and mirrors, kid. Smoke and mirrors.

LOGAN

But, if I noticed it…

FRED

You think our supervisors don’t know? Believe me, they know. They need us to do good. We do good, they do good. Their scores are tied to our scores. It’s like a sales structure. You make more if the guys under you make more. Except that in a sales structure, you want to help the guys under you, so they perform better. Not this observation “I-didn’t-see-this, you’re-a-two, I-did-see-this, you’re-a-four” bullshit.

LOGAN

Were you a four last year?
FRED
My point is,—the guy who came up with this whole evaluation thing—Michaelson?—where’s he from?, California?—My point is, I’d respect this guy Michaelson if he was like, “Hey, that’s not how my evaluation model is supposed to be used. It was supposed to help teachers improve, not as a tool for school districts to evaluate how well you do your job. You can’t use it like that.” Stand up for the working man—he was a teacher, stand up for teachers. Not “you score this, three observations next year—you score this, one observation.”

LOGAN
He is a she.

FRED
Huh?

LOGAN
The observation paradigm you’re talking about. The Michaelson Model. Michaelson is a woman.

FRED
No shit? Figures. I guess I’d whore it out, too, if they paid me enough.

LOGAN
I think it’s actually a good model.

FRED
You drank the Kool Aid, huh?

LOGAN
You can’t turn this in. They’re gonna catch you. A hundred percent they’re gonna catch you.

FRED
I’m not doing anything wrong. Not really.

LOGAN
I think they might disagree.

FRED
I wasn’t looking for an ethics lecture. I just wanted you to check my numbers.

LOGAN
Why are you doing this to me?

FRED
What am I doing?
LOGAN
What is this?, a test? Is this some kind of a test?

FRED
Relax a second, kid.

LOGAN
“Check your numbers”? The numbers stink.

FRED
Alright, alright.

LOGAN
And why do you call me “kid” all the time? Why do you do that?

FRED
Hey, I’m just trying to give you some free advice. From somebody who has been around the block.

LOGAN
You called me “kid” in front of the whole school last week.

FRED
Did I?

LOGAN
At the faculty meeting. You said, “The kid’s real good.” You said that in front of everybody.

FRED
I was giving you a compliment.

LOGAN
What do you get out of putting me down?

FRED
“Get out of”?

LOGAN
You know the numbers give you away. You knew that before I walked in here. So you brought me in here to what?, to show off? To show me how smart you are?

FRED
Maybe I’m trying to teach you a little something, kid. Huh? Maybe you should just shut up and take the compliment.
LOGAN
Just don’t do anything you wouldn’t want to see in the newspaper tomorrow.

FRED
I’m not raping little kids. I’m making my job a little easier.

LOGAN
Anytime something goes wrong in this country, people blame the schools. All I’m saying is, don’t give them another reason.

FRED
Why? Are you gonna tell on me?

LOGAN
No.

FRED
What are we?, adults?, or are we children? Is this the school yard? You gonna tell the playground monitor?

LOGAN
I just said, “No.”

FRED
Goddamn right, “No.”

(LOGan stands and tries to maneuver out from behind the desk. Fred corners him in.)

LOGAN
Get out of my way.

FRED
Sit down.

LOGAN
I’m asking you nicely.

FRED
Oh, “you’re asking me nicely”?

LOGAN
What is this?, “Meet me behind the football field after school”?

FRED
I said, “Sit down.”
LOGAN
What’s wrong with you?

FRED
I’m the guy who might just save your ass.

LOGAN
What the hell are you talking about?

FRED
“Loves New Wave Jazz music, especially trumpet. Binge watches *Scooby Doo*. But only the new episodes.”

(Logan is surprised.)

“A passion for good quinoa with spinach.”

(Logan becomes slowly mortified.)

Hey, relax kid. Your secret is safe with me. “Quinoa.” What even is that?

LOGAN
It’s a grain.

FRED
I know what it is.

LOGAN
Because not everybody knows.

FRED
“Quinoa”? Really? And *those* are just the *few* things that are fit to talk about in mixed company. Back in my day, the rest of those things were things we wouldn’t talk about it public, much less post on the internet for the whole world to see.

LOGAN
What are you doing?

FRED
Wait a second. Did I say “secret”? Can something be “secret” if everybody knows about it?

LOGAN
Why did you look up my dating profile?

FRED
*Me*?! Jesus Christ. I can’t even work a spreadsheet, you think I’m—? The *kids*! The *kids* looked it up. They *found* you.

LOGAN
Not possible.
FRED
Mister High Tech, Mister Computer, Mister Online Lessons, Mister Spreadsheet. So much smarter, so much savvier—what’s it like?, dating a computer? Kids found your profile?

LOGAN
I’m telling you, kids did not find my profile. I have so many privacy settings, it’s like Fort Knox. Like, I can barely find it.

FRED
That guy you’re talking to? “Bryan” is it?, with a “Y”?
(Logan—terror.)
Is one of the girls in my class. She’s pretending to be him. Hey, it’s alright. It happens to the best of us. You walk around here like your shit don’t stink. Like you’re cock of the walk. You think you’re pretty smart. You went to State. Yeah, well guess who else went to State? Yeah, that’s right. And look where we are now. Right in the same wing, right next door to each other.

LOGAN
I’m allowed to have a dating profile.

FRED
Oh sure. You’re allowed to have a lot of things.

LOGAN
Who I am out there, and who I am in here, that’s two different things.

FRED
Once you’re a teacher, you’re a teacher. And that person that lived out there?, that was a human being?, they are in the past.

(A long beat.)

LOGAN
They tell you not to eat in the teachers’ lunchroom.

“They”? 

LOGAN
“They,” common wisdom. Because eventually we are going to meet somebody like you.

FRED
Good looking, charming, full of snarky war stories?

LOGAN
A teacher whose goal in life is to bring the world down and us with it.
FRED

(This stings. This misunderstanding is embarrassing.)

That’s not what I’m doing.

LOGAN

Pushing kids to get my dating profile?

FRED

Hey, hey, hold on now.

LOGAN

There are plenty of other ways you could have said what you had to say.

FRED

Alright. Maybe you’re right. Look, I like you. You’re a bright young man. I’m not trying to knock you down. I’m trying to open your eyes. Common Wisdom never taught in the American public school system. This isn’t “a mind is a terrible thing to waste” and “we are the world” and “go out and make a difference.” This is get chewed up and spit out and wake up the next day and come in and do it all over again and keep your eye on the prize of retirement and the free luncheon the union throws for you at the end of a career full of disappointments.

LOGAN

I’m not looking to make a career full of disappointments.

FRED

Nobody is.

LOGAN

I’m looking to make successes.

FRED

The successes only stand out because of how many disappointments there are. Look, I’m trying to help you.

(Genuinely hurt, at being so misconstrued.)

Come on, Logan. Mr. Crane…

(Pause.)

You’re angry at me. You’re actually angry at me.

LOGAN

You are what the data says you are. You can’t B.S. it your whole life.

FRED

It’s just data. It’s just numbers. Flip them this way, flip them that way. You can make them say whatever you want.
LOGAN
You can’t fake data. Maybe you could, back in the day of the dinosaur. But not anymore.

FRED
You’re angry, because I’m right. And you know I’m right.
(Referring again to the dating profile.)
“Six foot one, a hundred eighty pounds.” Oh, please.

That’s not the same thing.

FRED
“Yale pre-med”? That’s not the same thing? How can you say you were “Yale pre-med” if you weren’t “Yale pre-med”?

LOGAN
Because that is a whole made up world, and everybody knows that. Everybody agrees. Out there is make believe. But in here? In here, this is supposed to be the real world. This is supposed to be real preparation for what it’s really gonna be like out there.

FRED
“You can be President of the United States. You can be an astronaut. You can be anything you want to be.” That’s real to you? Good luck in this profession.

LOGAN
Nobody has wanted to be an astronaut in twenty years, Fred. Who’d want to? I can make a bigger difference with my phone. I can run America from my phone. And make a hell of a lot of money doing it, too. And I don’t need to be President or go to space to do it. If you stopped and looked at what was really going on in here, maybe you’d understand that.

FRED
(Fred scoffs, shakes his head.)
You’ve got it all figured out, huh?

LOGAN
Don’t take it too hard. You’ll catch on eventually.
(Logan gathers his belongings. He stops at the door.)
I’ll see you tomorrow morning, kid.

(LOGAN exits. Fred is left sitting behind his desk.)

LIGHTS DOWN

END PLAY