

*(Beat. DR. ROMAN takes AMY's smart phone and scrolls whatever article she found.)*

DR. ROMAN: I thought cherubs were fat pink babies.

AMY: It's ... one fourth baby.

DR. ROMAN: Is that part — cow?

AMY: Ox, technically.

DR. ROMAN: Huh.

AMY: I figure the other ... *cherubim* ... will probably come for him soon.

DR. ROMAN: Thank you, Amy. We'll take good care of him, till then.

*(They remove their gloves and feed the cherub kibble by hand. We hear the eagle and the ox head crunching away as the lion head purrs in contentment. The box fills with light, illuminating them both.)*

END OF PLAY

## THE MICHAELSON MODEL

---

by Alexis Kozak

## CHARACTERS

FRED, male, 40ish to 60ish. A veteran teacher. Any race or ethnicity.

LOGAN, male, early-20s. A first-year teacher. Overtly sure of himself. Any race or ethnicity.

## SETTING

An American high school classroom.

## TIME

The present. Shortly after the end of the school day.

## 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.

## PRODUCTION HISTORY

*The Michaelson Model* was presented by Sheila Duane and Playwrights at Night at Jersey Shore Arts Center in Ocean Grove, NJ, on October 5th, 2022. The production was directed by Alexis Kozak. The cast was as follows:

FRED: James Benner

LOGAN: PJ Benson

*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?

FRED: 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 —

FRED: "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.

FRED: 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: All right. All right.

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 all right. 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.

FRED: "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: All right. 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.

LOGAN: 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.*)

END OF PLAY