

Illinois Wesleyan University

From the Selected Works of Jared Brown

2008

Rage

Jared Brown, *Illinois Wesleyan University*



SELECTEDWORKS™

Available at: <http://works.bepress.com/jared-brown/33/>

RAGE
a one-act play by
Jared Brown

© 2008 by Jared Brown

RAGE

A one-act play by Jared Brown

Characters:

Erica, age 23

Michael, her husband, age 26

Henry, their neighbor from the apartment next door, in his late 20s

(An apartment in a college town. There's a door leading to the hallway outside the apartment, another door leading to the bedroom, and an exit leading to the kitchen. On stage are a sofa with a coffee table in front of it, and a chair, a desk with a stack of papers and a cell phone on it. A kitchen knife is on the coffee table. Erica is seated at the desk, taking notes from an open book.)

SCENE ONE

MICHAEL

Thirty-six times I've asked you not to leave this knife here, Erica. Thirty-six damn times.

ERICA

You've been counting? Thirty-six times, exactly?

MICHAEL

Close enough. What if Julia toddled in here, bumped into the desk and the knife fell off?

ERICA

At two months old? Give it a rest, Michael. She can't even turn over in the crib; she's not going to be toddling anywhere.

MICHAEL

Damn it, you know what I'm talking about. It's dangerous to leave a knife on the table – dangerous for you, dangerous for me, dangerous for anybody who might come into the room.

ERICA

Well, then, take the goddamned knife off the table and put it where it belongs if it bothers you so much.

MICHAEL

No, it's not my responsibility. I didn't put it there. *You* take the goddamned knife off the table.

ERICA

Could you just be quiet for about fifteen minutes? I need to finish taking these notes before class.

MICHAEL

You have a class tonight?

ERICA

It's Wednesday, remember? I have classes every Wednesday and Thursday night? Does that ring a bell?

MICHAEL

(after a pause; seething) You can't take thirty seconds to put the knife away?

ERICA

In fifteen minutes, Michael.

MICHAEL

GOD DAMN IT, PUT THE KNIFE AWAY NOW. Not in fifteen minutes, not after your class, not before we go to bed, *now*!

(Erica ignores him as she continues to take notes. A knock at the door. Michael goes to open it. Henry is there. It's important that Henry seems to be the most average of average guys. There's nothing the least bit ominous or peculiar about him)

MICHAEL

Hey, Henry. What is it?

HENRY

Just wanted to be sure everything's okay. I couldn't help hearing a lot of yelling from next door.

MICHAEL

Yeah, it's fine. No problem.

HENRY

Erica. You all right? (*Erica waves at him without looking up from her notes*) Okay, well, I'll be leaving, then.

MICHAEL

So long. Thanks for stopping by.

HENRY

(*reluctant to leave*) I'm right next door, you know. If I can help out with anything, just give me a holler. (*He exits; Michael closes the door behind him*)

MICHAEL

My God, now the whole building knows about us. Well, you sure as hell don't give a damn. You're just going to ignore me, right? Just going to sit there, taking your fucking notes while everybody in the building knows what's going on here. Well? Well? I want to talk about this, Erica. I want you to get your nose out of that book and TALK TO ME! (*He's virtually shaking with anger*)

ERICA

(*Calmly*) I'm going to school now, Michael. I'll finish taking notes while I'm waiting for class to begin. (*She gathers up her notes and her book, puts them in a shoulder bag*) Check Julia in half an hour, will you? She'll need changing or feeding.

MICHAEL

How the hell will I know what she needs?

ERICA

Smell her, Michael. If she stinks, she needs changing. If not, give her a bottle of milk.

MICHAEL

What is that, sarcasm? Are you being snide, Erica? Is it the best you can do? (*Erica, bag in hand, begins moving toward the door. Michael intercepts her*) I'm talking to you, Erica. Don't try to leave while I'm talking to you.

ERICA

Oh, for God's sake, Michael, get out of my way.

MICHAEL

(Completely losing all control) GET OUT OF YOUR WAY? You want me to get out of your way? *(He grabs her by the arms)* You get out of my way! *(He throws her to the floor)* You fucking bitch.

ERICA

Jesus Christ, that hurt.

MICHAEL

You think *that* hurt? Don't try to get up, Erica. I won't be responsible for what happens to you if you try to get up.

ERICA

(Still on the floor) You're crazy, Michael.

MICHAEL

I'm crazy? *I'm* crazy? You're certifiable, Erica. In fact, I might just have you put away. I know a guy in the law school who knows just how that would work.

ERICA

Will you let me get up, please. I'm going to be late for class.

MICHAEL

Oh, yeah? I thought you had fifteen minutes. I thought you were going to study in the classroom before the class begins.

ERICA

(Getting to her feet and picking up her shoulder bag) I was – ten minutes ago. Now I've just got to get to class. *(She walks to the door, stops)* Look, calm down, will you? I'll be back by eight-thirty and maybe we can talk this thing out. I don't know why you're so angry with me, but you have to calm down so you don't wake up the baby.

MICHAEL

What about the knife, Erica?

ERICA

(sighs) All right, I'll put away the knife if that's what you want.

MICHAEL

That's what I want. That's what I've wanted all along.

(Erica walks to the coffee table, picks up the knife and puts it in the desk drawer)

ERICA

Okay? Happy now? God damn it, Michael, you really burn me up. *(She crosses to the door, opens it and slams it as she exits. Michael picks up a book from the bookshelf, but he's too agitated to read. After a moment, he throws the book at the door. He buries his head in his hands. A knock at the door.)*

MICHAEL

(Yelling) Who the hell is it?

HENRY

(Offstage) It's me, Michael. Henry.

MICHAEL

(Mumbles to himself) Oh, for God's sake. *(He sighs, then gets up, crosses to the door and opens it)* What do you want, Henry?

HENRY

Can I come in?

MICHAEL

Sure, sure. I don't have anything to do. Just come on in and have a chair. Come on, come on, I'm not going to stand here holding the door forever.

HENRY

(*Entering*) Is Erica here?

MICHAEL

No. You heard the door slamming a minute ago? That was Erica, on her way to class.

HENRY

It's none of my business –

MICHAEL

That's the truth.

HENRY

But whatever's going on in here sounds like a madhouse. The yelling, the banging – I mean, it's not easy living next door to you two.

MICHAEL

We're trying to work out our problems, okay?

HENRY

If this is the way you work them out, I'd hate to be around if they *don't* get worked out.

MICHAEL

Look. Give me a break, will you? That woman is the most infuriating person I've ever known. Sometimes I think I could kill her.

HENRY

Are you serious?

MICHAEL

Not that I would, of course –

HENRY

I could help, you know.

MICHAEL

Help? With what?

HENRY

If you want to kill Erica. I've got a few suggestions.

MICHAEL

I didn't mean it, Henry. It's just an expression, you know?

HENRY

Is it? When someone says he'd like to kill his wife, I think it's more than just an expression.

MICHAEL

Well, in *this* case it's just an expression.

HENRY

Then I guess you don't want to hear any of my ideas.

MICHAEL

Wait a minute. What have I missed here? Why should *you* want to kill her?

HENRY

Oh, I don't care if she lives or dies. But it seems to me that you've got a problem, and maybe I could help.

MICHAEL

I thought you hardly knew Erica. Did you two have a relationship or something?

HENRY

No. Other than to say hello when we pass in the hall, I don't know her at all.

MICHAEL

Then what the hell are you talking about?

HENRY

I just don't like the way she's always arguing with you, Michael. I can tell that it upsets you. I don't like you to be upset, that's all.

MICHAEL

Wait a minute. What do you care if I'm upset or not?

HENRY

That's just me, I guess. Maybe I have too much empathy. But, you know, I can put myself in your shoes. I know how *I'd* feel if a woman made me so mad that I'd want to kill her.

MICHAEL

(*after a pause*) Look, maybe you're taking this too seriously. Hell, maybe *I'm* taking it too seriously.

HENRY

No, no, trust your feelings, Michael.

MICHAEL

I'll work on it, Henry. But I'm a little busy now, you know. I don't want to kick you out, but . . .

HENRY

You think I'm crazy, don't you?

MICHAEL

Well, not crazy, maybe, but . . .

HENRY

But?

MICHAEL

Maybe a little *too* empathetic. I mean, Erica pisses me off, no doubt about that. But killing her? No, like I said, that was just an expression.

HENRY

All right. But you think it over, okay? If you want any suggestions – or if you have any ideas, and you want my help – just knock at my door.

MICHAEL

Okay, Henry, okay. Just don't wait for the knock, all right?

HENRY

Sure. It doesn't matter to me what you do. You can bottle it all up inside or you can kill the bitch, I don't care. But take my advice on one thing. You've got a class to teach tomorrow, right?

MICHAEL

Yeah. How do you know that?

HENRY

I know a lot about you, Michael.

MICHAEL

You do? Like what?

HENRY

We'll talk about it some time. Anyway, after you get back from your class, tell Erica something that'll make her happy.

MICHAEL

Why?

HENRY

Because I'm trying to help you out here. Tell her – I don't know, tell her you got a raise. And be happy about it. Don't let her know that she's driving you crazy.

MICHAEL

(a pause) Get out, will you, Henry.

HENRY

I'm going. But do you have my cell phone number? Let me write it down for you. *(He takes out a card and writes down his number, then hands the card to Michael)*

MICHAEL

What's this for?

HENRY

If you ever want to reach me when I'm not home. *(Michael puts the card on the desk)*
We'll talk again. *(He exits. Michael closes the door slowly behind him. Lights fade out)*

SCENE TWO

(Lights up to reveal Erica, folding diapers on the couch. Michael enters. Erica hears him come in, but doesn't turn around to look at him.)

ERICA

Michael?

MICHAEL

(Sheepishly) Hi. You still mad at me about what happened last night?

ERICA

I'll get over it. Or I'm trying to, anyway. What did you teach today? Biology 103?
How'd it go?

MICHAEL

Pretty well, I guess. I'd like it better if somebody asked a question once in a while, but they just sit there, looking bored as hell.

ERICA

Anything happening in the department?

MICHAEL

Oh, just more of the same, you know. Garbage in, garbage out. Lots of gossip at the water cooler about the chairman and his secretary. Of course, we don't really have a water cooler, but you know what I mean.

ERICA

That's it? Sounds about as exciting as folding diapers.

MICHAEL

Let's see. Oh, yeah, I almost forgot. I got that raise I asked for.

ERICA

You almost forgot? (*Turns to look at him*) That's great, Michael. When does it begin?

MICHAEL

Not until next semester. Still, it's something to look forward to.

ERICA

More milk for the baby.

MICHAEL

Maybe even a sitter once in a while so we can take in a movie.

ERICA

We could buy that table I saw at Goodwill.

MICHAEL

Or even get the brakes fixed on the car.

ERICA

You haven't already done that? I thought you took care of it last week.

MICHAEL

Well, I was going to, but I didn't get around to it.

ERICA

That could be dangerous, Michael. Don't wait on that one. Get them fixed right away.

MICHAEL

Using what for money?

ERICA

Use a credit card. *(She smiles)* That way we won't have to pay for it.

MICHAEL

Okay, babe, one brake job coming right up.

ERICA

"Babe"? I never thought I'd hear that again.

MICHAEL

I know. I'm really sorry about last night, Erica. I don't know what the hell got into me.

ERICA

(about to say something else, but changes her mind) Okay, apology accepted.

MICHAEL

Hey, if Julia's asleep, how about spending a little time in the sack?

ERICA

No, I don't feel like it right now.

MICHAEL

Right now? When will you feel like it?

ERICA

I don't know. Sooner or later, I suppose.

MICHAEL

Look, I said I was sorry, didn't I? What the hell else am I supposed to do?

ERICA

You're always sorry, Michael. But that doesn't stop you from lashing out at me. I'm afraid of what you might do next time.

MICHAEL

Next time? There won't be a next time. What do you want from me, Erica?

ERICA

Take it easy. I don't want to set you off.

MICHAEL

What's that supposed to mean?

ERICA

Maybe you get so angry because of something I'm doing. I don't know. I just don't want it to happen any more.

MICHAEL

It won't. I promise. *(pause)* Now do you want to come to bed with me?

ERICA

No, I told you before, I don't want to have sex with you right now.

MICHAEL

(trying to keep his temper, but beginning to lose it) Right now? Right now? You never want to have sex with me, Erica, that's the truth, isn't it?

ERICA

Why would I want to make love to a man who beats me up?

MICHAEL

Beats you up? Come on, Erica. I threw you down on the floor, I didn't beat you up.

ERICA

I'm afraid of you, Michael. I really am.

MICHAEL

(Beginning to lose his temper) God damn it, Erica, I've apologized to you again and again. Don't piss me off.

ERICA

(sighs) Here we go. *(The baby is heard crying in the bedroom)* I'm going to go feed Julia. *(She exits into the bedroom. Michael begins pacing and speaking to himself)*

MICHAEL

God damn it, she drives me crazy. I wish she'd leave me alone. I wish she'd – *(He ends his pacing at the desk; looks down and sees Henry's card. He picks it up, looks at it for several seconds, then picks up the cell phone and dials. As he waits for the phone to be answered, he mutters to himself)* God damn bitch. She deserves whatever she gets. *(Into the phone)* Henry? It's Michael – from next door. *(pause)* Yeah. *(pause)* Well, not so well, I guess. Listen, Erica's got another class tonight. Could you come over? *(pause)* No, I haven't decided on anything, I'd just like to talk. She'll be leaving some time after six-thirty. Can you be here at seven? *(pause)* Okay, I'll see you then. *(He hangs up the phone. The lights fade to black)*

SCENE THREE

(A knock on the door in the dark. As the lights come up, Michael is crossing to the door. He opens it. Henry is there)

MICHAEL

Thanks for coming over, Henry, but, look, I'm sorry I called. I don't think this is such a good idea after all.

HENRY

What? Not a good idea for us to have a talk?

MICHAEL

No, I made a mistake. Erica and I were having an argument and I . . . Well, I just lost it.

HENRY

That's a shame. But you're okay now?

MICHAEL

Yeah, I'm fine. I should have let you know earlier.

HENRY

That's okay. Would I be bothering you if I asked for a glass of water?

MICHAEL

Uh – with ice or without?

HENRY

Either way.

(Michael goes into the kitchen. Henry comes into the room and closes the front door. He wanders around, looking at the papers on the desk. Michael comes back with a glass of water.)

HENRY

(Holding a paper from the desk) Is this Erica's handwriting? Or yours?

MICHAEL

Let me see. *(He takes the paper from Henry as he hands the glass to him)* It's mine. It's for an article I'm trying to write.

HENRY

So your contract'll be renewed by the Biology department?

MICHAEL

Yeah. These are private papers, you know. I don't really want anybody looking at them.

HENRY

Sure, I understand. What if somebody were to come in and plagiarize your article?

MICHAEL

I'm not worried about that. It's just that it's not ready to be looked at yet. It's a first draft.

HENRY

Can't write a final draft until you've written a first draft, eh?

MICHAEL

(looks at Henry skeptically) No, I don't suppose you can.

HENRY

Well, where shall we sit?

MICHAEL

No, Henry, look, didn't you hear what I said before?

HENRY

What was that?

MICHAEL

That I never should have asked you to come over.

HENRY

But here I am.

MICHAEL

I know. And I'm sorry I've wasted your time.

HENRY

(Moves to the chair and sits) I'll just take a seat here. You can sit on the sofa – or not, whichever you'd prefer. Walk around, if you want; I don't mind.

MICHAEL

Whose apartment are we in, Henry? I'm under the impression that you're sitting in *my* chair in *my* apartment.

HENRY

Very observant, Michael. (*He takes a long drink of water*)

MICHAEL

Yesterday you said you knew a lot about me. What do you know? And how did you find out?

HENRY

Oh, just a lot of stuff. I know your baby's name is Julia, that she's two months old, that you and Erica have been married for a year and a half, that Erica's trying to finish her degree in English, that you're an instructor in the Biology department, but you're not sure you'll be reappointed for next year. All correct so far?

MICHAEL

So far, yeah.

HENRY

Maybe you shouldn't have gotten Erica pregnant so soon. It must be hard for her to finish a degree when she's got a child to look after. Well, let's see. Your parents live in Connecticut, am I right? And their anniversary is – let me think – October 14th.

MICHAEL

Where did you get all this information?

HENRY

Who's Who in America. (*When Michael looks puzzled, Henry laughs*) No, no, I'm just kidding.

MICHAEL

I'm not listed in *Who's Who in America*.

HENRY

I know. That's why it's so funny. You looked for a minute as if you thought maybe you *were* in there.

MICHAEL

This stuff isn't published anywhere, for God's sake.

HENRY

That's true. But your life's an open book to me.

MICHAEL

Is it?

HENRY

The class you taught today is Biology 103, right? But you really don't get much satisfaction from the class, do you? Rather be teaching upperclassmen.

MICHAEL

Look, Henry –

HENRY

But I think we'd better move on. Erica'll be home by eight-thirty – unless she goes out for a cup of coffee with her friend. Fran, isn't it? Fran drinks her coffee black, but Erica likes cream and sugar. (*Laughs*) Well, that's just a little sample of what I know about you and your family, Michael.

MICHAEL

What's this all about, Henry? What do you want from me?

HENRY

Want? Me? I don't want a thing from you. I'm just here to help you with your problem.

MICHAEL

What problem is that?

HENRY

How to kill your wife. And to get away with it, of course.

MICHAEL

Okay, Henry, that's enough. Get out of here, right now.

HENRY

(Looks at his watch) It's past seven-thirty. We only have an hour to make our plans.

MICHAEL

(Picks up his cell phone) Do you want me to call the police?

HENRY

That's your business, Michael. What would you like to tell them? How you abuse Erica? Or is there something else on your mind?

MICHAEL

(Puts the cell phone down and takes the glass of water out of Henry's hand) All right, Henry, I think you've had enough water.

HENRY

(Remains seated. He shows no evidence of discomfort) Shall we switch to something else? Beer? Wine? Coffee?

MICHAEL

No, we won't. Because you'll be leaving now.

HENRY

As soon as we finish our conversation. I have a few ideas I think you ought to hear.

MICHAEL

About killing my wife?

HENRY

Good for you, Michael. It took you a while, but we're finally on the same wavelength.

MICHAEL

You're out of your mind, Henry. Out of your fucking mind.

HENRY

I'll tell you what. How about if I talk and you listen? Or better yet, take notes so that you won't forget.

MICHAEL

It's not something I'd be likely to forget.

HENRY

No, you're right. Not something you'd forget. Well, let's begin. Did you tell Erica you got a raise – as I suggested?

MICHAEL

Yeah, I did.

HENRY

Ah. So you've begun to follow my plan already.

MICHAEL

I don't know why the hell I did it. Now I'll just have to tell her that the raise didn't go through, that the Dean decided against it or something.

HENRY

No, no, Michael. That would spoil everything. How did she react when you told her?

MICHAEL

Well . . . She was thrilled, I guess. Who wouldn't be? We could certainly use a little extra money.

HENRY

Perfect.

MICHAEL

I don't see why you're asking. I thought you knew everything about me.

HENRY

Well, actually, I do. You decided to use the money to fix the brakes on your car, didn't you?

MICHAEL

Jesus, have you got a microphone in here?

HENRY

But Erica wouldn't sleep with you. And that led to another fight. And that's why you called me.

(Michael is looking around the room, trying to find a hidden microphone)

But that's perfect. Exactly how I planned it. So: it's on to the next move.

MICHAEL

What are you talking about? There won't be any next move. The only move is your getting the hell out of here.

HENRY

Here's what I want you to do. When Erica gets home, you tell her that a baby sitter's on the way and that you're taking her out to see a movie. And afterwards you'll stop for dessert and a glass of wine.

MICHAEL

I don't get it. *Is* a baby sitter on the way?

HENRY

Let me take care of that. You just tell her exactly what I said.

MICHAEL

So what happens when nobody shows up?

HENRY

Somebody'll show up. I guarantee it.

MICHAEL

Who? You?

HENRY

Could be, Michael. You never know.

MICHAEL

And you'll what? Shoot her? Cut her throat?

HENRY

Oh my goodness, you have a melodramatic streak, don't you?

MICHAEL

But what's the point of all this? Why should I tell her we're going to a movie? Why don't you just come in and kill her if you're going to kill her?

HENRY

(Laughs) If I'm going to kill her? Michael, you're on the wrong track here. I said I'd *help* you to kill Erica, not that I'd do it myself.

MICHAEL

You're expecting me to kill her while you're in the apartment?

HENRY

I'm not expecting anything, Michael.

MICHAEL

Then will you explain to me, for Christ's sake? Will you explain what the hell you're talking about?

HENRY

If I were to kill your wife I'd be taking quite a risk, wouldn't I? No, that's something I wouldn't even do for you.

MICHAEL

For me? Why would you want to do *anything* for me? What am I to you?

HENRY

My next-door neighbor.

MICHAEL

Yeah, and you're a goddamned maniac.

HENRY

Well, that's a little excessive. Of course, it's true that *I'm* not listed in *Who's Who in America*.

MICHAEL

(*After a pause*) I never said that I was.

HENRY

Of course you did. I was sitting right here, drinking a glass of water, when you boasted you were listed in *Who's Who in America*.

MICHAEL

No, that's what *you* said.

HENRY

What is it, then? Dreams of grandeur? Do *you* think you belong in *Who's Who in America*?

MICHAEL

What? I can barely follow you.

HENRY

I could probably arrange it. I have a few connections in the publishing business.

MICHAEL

I'll bet you do.

HENRY

But they probably wouldn't put you in the book unless you'd accomplished something. Have you accomplished anything, Michael?

MICHAEL

Nothing anyone would want to write about.

HENRY

(Calmly) You must think you're pretty hot shit, I guess, but maybe the rest of the world hasn't quite reached the same conclusion.

(A key is heard in the door. Erica enters and turns back to close the door)

ERICA

Flanagan ended class early tonight. *(She turns around)* Oh, hi, Henry. I didn't know you were here.

HENRY

Hello, Erica. I think Michael has a surprise for you.

ERICA

Oh? What's up, Michael?

MICHAEL

Uh – I don't know what he's talking about, Erica.

HENRY

But Michael, you've been telling me that you want to take Erica out tonight. As soon as she comes home from class, you said.

ERICA

We can't go out, Henry. We have a two-month-old baby.

HENRY

Why do you think I'm here, Erica? I volunteered to baby-sit.

ERICA

Well – have you ever done this before?

HENRY

Oh, all the time. I'm a world's champion baby-sitter.

ERICA

Do you know how to change her if she needs changing? Do you know how to feed her? What would you do if anything went wrong?

HENRY

Well, if something was *seriously* wrong, I'd call 9-1-1, of course. But if it were just something I didn't know how to take care of, I'd call you. You will take your cell phone along, won't you, Michael?

MICHAEL

Well –

HENRY

Oh, I think you should. Just in case, you know.

ERICA

(After a brief pause) Well, thank you, Henry. That's very sweet of you. *(To Michael)* Where are we going?

MICHAEL

Uh – to a movie, I guess.

HENRY

Oh, come on Michael. You haven't told her the best part.

MICHAEL

You mean – after the movie?

HENRY

Yes, you were telling me all about how you were going to take Erica out for a drink and a special dessert.

ERICA

Really, Michael? We haven't done anything like that for so long – well, I think it was before we got married.

HENRY

He's just been so busy, Erica. But, you know, that's all he could talk about before you came in. How excited he was that he could take you out, just as if it were an old-fashioned date.

ERICA

But we can't afford –

HENRY

Oh, sure you can. Michael was telling me how he just got a raise. He must be an awfully good teacher to get a raise in the middle of the school year.

MICHAEL

Thanks, Henry. Look, Erica and I are going to wash up and put on different clothes. Why don't you go back to your apartment and come back in about ten minutes?

HENRY

(Pauses for a moment) That'll be fine. *(He gets up from the chair and walks to the front door, then turns back)* By the way, Erica, may I say that you're looking beautiful tonight?

(Erica smiles and Henry opens the door and exits. Michael again begins to search the room, looking for a device that allows Henry to eavesdrop)

ERICA

What're you doing? Aren't you going to change your clothes?

MICHAEL

Shh. (Quietly) Give me a minute. (He continues his search, looking through the desk. Then he notices the heat register. He goes over to it and closes it.)

ERICA

What's going on?

MICHAEL

(Speaking quietly) Keep it down. I don't know how, but Henry can hear every word we're saying in here.

ERICA

What?

MICHAEL

And he knows things you won't believe – about you, me, the baby, my parents – all sorts of personal stuff.

ERICA

What were you looking for just now?

MICHAEL

A microphone. Or maybe some kind of a recording device. Hell, I don't know what I'm looking for. Something that doesn't belong here.

ERICA

Is that why you closed the register?

MICHAEL

Yeah. I don't know if sound would transmit through the register into his apartment, but maybe it would.

ERICA

(After a brief pause when she realizes that Henry might be dangerous) Do you really think we should leave Julia with him tonight?

MICHAEL

Hell, no. The guy's out of his mind. I wouldn't let him get anywhere near Julia.

ERICA

So I guess that means we're not going out.

MICHAEL

It's Henry's idea that we should go out, not mine. And you'll never believe why. He wants to help me kill you.

ERICA

Kill me?

MICHAEL

Yeah. He's got it in his head that I'm so pissed off at you that I'd like it if you were dead.

ERICA

How did he get that idea?

MICHAEL

It's my fault, I guess. The other day, after we had that big fight, I said something to him like "Sometimes I'd like to kill her." It was just an expression, but I was an idiot to say it.

ERICA

And what did he say?

MICHAEL

“I could help you out,” or something like that. “I’ve got some good ideas,” he said.

ERICA

My God. Shouldn’t we call the police?

MICHAEL

If I told them what I’ve been telling you, do you think they’d believe me? They’d think I’m the one who’s gone over the deep end.

ERICA

You told Henry to come back in ten minutes.

MICHAEL

Yeah. I didn’t know what else to do. I’ve been trying to get rid of him for an hour, but he wouldn’t budge.

ERICA

That means he’ll be back in about five minutes. Or less.

MICHAEL

So we’ve got just a few minutes to figure out what the hell we’re going to do.

ERICA

Don’t look at me. I haven’t got a clue. Do you think he’s violent?

MICHAEL

I don’t know. But he’s weird. I wouldn’t be surprised if were violent.

ERICA

Can he hear us, do you think?

MICHAEL

Who knows? I know that he’s listened to us before, though.

ERICA

God, Michael, this is creepy. I'm scared.

MICHAEL

All right. Look. You go in there with Julia. I'll deal with Henry.

ERICA

What are you going to do?

MICHAEL

I wish I knew. Do you still have that tape recorder you bought for your class last year?

ERICA

Yeah. It's in the desk, I think.

(Michael crosses to the desk, takes out the tape recorder. He opens it to make sure a cassette is inside, then closes it. He presses the record button, then sets the tape recorder on the chair behind the desk.)

MICHAEL

Okay, you stay with the baby. *(Erica crosses into the bedroom. Michael looks through the desk, takes the knife out of the drawer and puts it in his pocket. A knock at the front door)*

HENRY

(Offstage) It's me. Can I come in? *(Michael goes to the door and opens it)* You're not changed.

MICHAEL

Yeah, Erica and I had a fight and she left. Said she was going to her girl friend's apartment.

HENRY

I didn't hear the two of you arguing. And I didn't hear anyone going down the stairs.

MICHAEL

There wasn't any yelling, Henry. And she didn't go running out. She just left quietly – and I imagine she went down the stairs that way, too.

HENRY

Well, there goes our plan.

MICHAEL

Whose plan?

HENRY

My plan. But that's all right. There are more where that came from.

MICHAEL

Where do they come from, Henry? I've been meaning to ask.

HENRY

Oh, I just have a fertile imagination, I suppose. It's never let me down yet.

MICHAEL

Yet? Have you done something like this before?

HENRY

Helped somebody to solve his problems, you mean?

MICHAEL

Yeah. By killing his wife.

HENRY

Let me think. No, I don't think that particular scenario has ever come up before. But I've been able to help when needed, let's just put it that way.

MICHAEL

Have you ever helped anyone kill *anyone*?

HENRY

(Laughs) Oh, Michael, you're so transparent. Why don't you turn off the tape recorder and hand the cassette to me?

MICHAEL

What tape recorder?

HENRY

The one on the chair behind the desk. Did you really think that I was going to say something to incriminate myself while you were recording our conversation? My goodness, you *are* naïve. *(He walks over to the tape recorder, takes out the cassette and pockets it.)*

MICHAEL

Well . . . I don't think you're needed any more, Henry. Erica and I won't be going out tonight.

HENRY

Because she's at her girlfriend's apartment?

MICHAEL

That's right.

HENRY

But what about you? I've noticed that you've been very tense lately. In fact, you seem rather agitated now. Why don't you go out for a drink while I stay with the baby?

MICHAEL

I don't want a drink. And I don't want you anywhere near our baby.

HENRY

She's such a good baby, too. Whenever I've been in your apartment, she's always sleeping. Of course, I've heard her crying once or twice when I've been next door – but she doesn't cry very often, does she?

MICHAEL

Not very often.

HENRY

You don't think there's anything wrong with her, do you? Maybe I should go and take a look.

MICHAEL

(Taking the knife out of his pocket) I don't want to hurt you, Henry, but if you take a step toward the bedroom, I'll cut you down.

HENRY

I don't think that would be a very potent weapon, Michael. I don't think you could count on it in an emergency. And why would you want to use it? All I've done is tried to be a friend to you.

MICHAEL

Some friend. With a friend like you –

HENRY

You don't need any enemies, right?

(The baby begins crying in the bedroom)

Ah. So she can cry after all. *(The crying stops abruptly)* Hm. I wonder what made her stop. Could someone be in there with her?

MICHAEL

You know Erica's in there.

HENRY

So I do. My, my, Michael, you've been telling me a tissue of lies.

MICHAEL

(Trying another tactic. He humors Henry) All right, Henry. You wanted to help me kill Erica. Now's your chance. *(Henry looks at him quizzically)* The bitch is alone in there with Julia. She can't escape. And I've got a knife.

HENRY

It doesn't sound as if you need any help.

MICHAEL

I might. If she tries to run away from me, you grab her and hold her.

HENRY

And that's all you want from me? You're wasting my talent for tactical planning, Michael.

MICHAEL

I don't need tactical planning. I just want to run my knife into her gut, Henry. And I'm counting on you to help me out.

HENRY

I'll need a pair of gloves. I wouldn't want my fingerprints to be found on her body – or anywhere in the apartment, for that matter.

MICHAEL

Gloves? Let's see, I think there's a pair of rubber gloves in the kitchen. Hold on. *(Michael puts the knife back in his pocket and goes into the kitchen. Henry takes the cassette tape out of his pocket and crushes it in two, then tears out the tape itself. He stuffs the tape and the cassette into his pocket. The baby begins crying again. Michael returns with a pair of rubber gloves.)* Found them. *(He hands the gloves to Henry, who puts them on.)* All right. I'm going to call Erica and tell her to come out here. Maybe you should sit down. We don't want her to know what we're going to do. *(Henry goes to the sofa and sits. Michael calls into the bedroom.)* Erica, come here, I need you.

(The baby continues to cry. Erica is silent for a moment, then calls out.)

ERICA

(Offstage) Michael? I thought you wanted me to stay in here.

MICHAEL

I did. But you can come out now.

(Erica enters and reacts with surprise when she sees Henry. The baby continues to cry)

ERICA

Henry. What are you doing here?

HENRY

I'm ready to begin baby-sitting. I promised that I would, remember?

ERICA

But Michael and I've decided not to go out.

HENRY

Oh, go ahead. I can take care of Julia.

ERICA

Why are you wearing those gloves?

HENRY

It's just a little eccentricity of mine. I'd rather not touch the baby – that way she can't give me a disease and I can't transmit any germs to her, either. I'm surprised you don't wear gloves, too.

ERICA

Actually, I do, sometimes. But not those. I've got a pair in the bedroom.

HENRY

It sounds as if your baby needs changing. Maybe you should put them on.

ERICA

Just a minute. (*She exits into the bedroom*)

MICHAEL

(*To Henry*) All right. Are you ready, Henry?

HENRY

Of course I am. But your fingerprints are all over that knife, do you realize that?

MICHAEL

Don't worry about it.

HENRY

But I do. Look, why don't you just give me the knife? I'll take care of it for you.

MICHAEL

That's all right. You just stop Erica if she tries to run. The bitch. I can't wait to see her face when I pull out the knife.

(Erica enters from the bedroom, wearing gloves. The baby is still crying.)

MICHAEL

(He pulls the knife from his pocket and hands it to Erica.) Here. Hold on to this. Now that you're a witness I'm going to call the police. *(He heads for the telephone)*

ERICA

Don't move, Michael.

MICHAEL

What?

ERICA

I said stay where you are.

MICHAEL

What are you talking about?

ERICA

Grab hold of him, Henry.

(Henry jumps to his feet and holds Michael's arms from behind.)

MICHAEL

What's going on?

ERICA

You'll never hit me again, you prick. And you'll never call me a bitch again.

MICHAEL

(Totally disoriented) What?

(Erica rushes at him and stabs him. He gives her a horrified look, then falls to his knees. He tries to get up, but falls over, dead)

ERICA

(To Henry. With satisfaction and surprise – but not comic surprise) It worked.

HENRY

I told you it would. My plans never go awry.

ERICA

What should I do with this knife?

HENRY

Just leave it there. Don't worry, there are no fingerprints on it.

ERICA

So what do we do now?

HENRY

Now we toss everything in the apartment on the floor, rip up those papers on the desk, take Michael's wallet out of his pocket, and make the whole thing look like a robbery.

ERICA

Will you get the wallet? I don't want to go near him.

HENRY

Sure. *(He removes the wallet from Michael's back pocket)*

ERICA

(As she goes to the desk and begins ripping up pages and tossing them to the floor) I should never have doubted you, Henry. Thanks for the help.

HENRY

My pleasure, Erica. Don't forget: if you need anything, I'm right next door.

(The lights fade as the baby continues crying; Erica and Henry continue to throw or drop things on the floor. End of play)

