

Real or Not

A short play

By Mark Chrisler

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REAL OR NOT

An interview table. Michael sits at one side, Rick enters from the other.

MICHAEL

Hi there! Rick?

RICK

Uh... Yep.

MICHAEL

Good to meet you. Michael.

RICK

Hi, Michael.

MICHAEL

Don't be nervous, Rick; nobody's going to get hurt. Just have a seat.

RICK

(sitting)

Thanks. Sorry.

MICHAEL

Not at all. You should know, we think you're the perfect man for the job.

RICK

Really?

MICHAEL

Really. Karen says you've performed spectacularly in your vetting interview, and... hell...

(miming some paperwork)

I can see that you've got a very impressive history here.

RICK

Thank you.

MICHAEL

So, there's really only one thing left, Rick. You see, here at Mendacicorp, we value a firm, critical eye. Do you think you've got that, Rick ol' buddy?

RICK

Sure. I mean, I think so.

MICHAEL

Great, great. Well, what I'd like to do is test that eye. I'm going to give you a couple of test questions to see if you can determine what's true and what's... not true. Or what's real and what's not. That sort of thing. You understand?

RICK

I'm not sure...

MICHAEL

Let me give you an example: since you walked in, I've said or done one thing that wasn't true. Can you tell me what it was?

RICK

Um... Since I walked in?

MICHAEL

That's right, Rick.

RICK

I'm sorry, I'm... I don't know...

MICHAEL

Did I:

- A. Tell you my name is Michael when it is not
- B. Tell you you're the perfect man for the job, when that isn't so
- C. Tell you no one would get hurt when someone probably will
- or D. pretend to have your C.V. in my hands when actually holding nothing?

RICK

Wow, let's see... what was C, again?

MICHAEL

Tell you no one would get hurt when someone probably will.

RICK

Okay, I think... yeah. I think it's C.

MICHAEL

Very good.

An audience member is whispering to her neighbor.

MICHAEL

From here on out...

(noticing the whispers, stopping and staring)

She notices and stops, embarrassed.

MICHAEL

(out of character)

Whenever you're ready.

(a moment, then back in character)

Very good. From here on out, if you notice anything I do or say that you suspect to be... uncanny, please point it out. You understand?

RICK

Yeah. Sure.

MICHAEL

Okay, let me ask another question: Which of the following things would be impossible:

- A. A necktie coming to life and strangling its owner
- B. The existence of a loving and all-knowing God
- C. A free-flying volcano
- D. Curing cancer through homeopathy.

RICK

Geez... Could I ask a clarifying question?

MICHAEL

Shoot. Would you like some coffee?

RICK

Yes please.

Michael rises, retrieves an empty French press and two mugs, into which he mimes pouring coffee.

RICK

When you say "homeopathy...?"

MICHAEL

Ah, yes.

(handing him a mug)

Here you go. Homeopathy here means using successively smaller quantities of substances that cause similar symptoms to an illness in order to cure that illness.

RICK

I see.

The audience member is whispering again.

MICHAEL

(out of character again)

We can wait.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

Sorry.

MICHAEL

(o.o.c.)

I've never understood what could be so fucking important that it's worth disrespecting actors who are trying to entertain you to say.

(pause)

What is it? What's so important?

AUDIENCE MEMBER

I was just saying there's no coffee.

MICHAEL

(o.o.c.)

Who fucking cares, "no coffee?" No coffee? None of this is real, you moron. Get the fuck out of here.

(pause)

Get the fuck out. The door is that way.

(pause)

Go.

(he crosses into the house and grabs her
by the hair, dragging her off stage)

Fucking coffee? None of this is real.

Michael takes Audience Member out of the theater, he can be heard to yell at her, over and over, "none of this is real," while beating her severely. Rick sits, not quite in character, not quite out of it, confused about what to do.

Finally, Michael brings Audience Member back in, she is upset and there is blood around her nose and mouth.

MICHAEL

(o.o.c.)

Sit down and shut up.

(he retakes his seat, rejoins the scene. Rick gives him a concerned look, Michael shakes his head to allay his concerns)

Any guess?

RICK

(after a moment, in character)

Is it... all of the above?

MICHAEL

Fantastic work, Rick. Now, tell me, did you notice what I did that was unreal during that question?

RICK

Um... No. I don't think so.

MICHAEL

You know why?

RICK

Why?

MICHAEL

Because that was a trick question! Good work! You've got the job, Rick!