

MICHAEL, a balding 30-something male sits at a kitchen table, rolling a cigar-sized joint, while KAREN, a 30-something female stands in front of the sink. There is an easel with a blank canvas beside the table.

KAREN

Why do Jews always tell you they're Jewish? It's like the second thing out of their mouths. Right after, "Hi, I'm Michael Klein."

MICHAEL

We assume it's something you've already picked up on. We're telling you, "Stop wondering." We're telling you, "You're right." You never hear us launch into a sermon afterwards, do you? We're clearing the air and moving on.

KAREN

Julia asked me if I was Jewish.

MICHAEL

Well, we're living together now. It's natural that she would be suspicious. What's new with Julia?

KAREN

It's already been two months, hasn't it. Oh Julia. Fine. How's that résumé coming along?

Michael holds up a cigar-sized joint with pride.

KAREN

That is a BIG one.

MICHAEL

Say it again. Just like that. I'll make it my new ringtone, Karen.

The doorbell rings.

KAREN

Are we expecting someone?

Michael gets to his feet, excitedly.

MICHAEL

They're here!

KAREN

Who's here?

Michael heads to the door and opens it. 2 women and 1 man enter. Michael greets each guest cordially. He slaps a name tag on each of them (JOY, ROGER, PENNY), then shuts the door.

MICHAEL

Karen, I present to you now: my great loves since...wait.
(holds up LINDSAY name tag)
We're missing one.

KAREN

What?

The doorbell rings again.

MICHAEL

That must be Lindsay.

He opens the door, slaps the LINDSAY sticker on the woman standing there, and heads back in.

MICHAEL

As I was saying, all my great loves. Each relationship boomed with life and vivacity. And each relationship resulted in abject failure. I can't let that happen again. I love you, Karen. I asked them here to help me retrace the past, figure out what went wrong, so I don't make the same mistake with you!

KAREN

Wait. What?

LINDSAY

Michael, who are all these people?

KAREN

(referencing
Lindsay)

Who is she? Are you two-three-four-five timing me?

JOY

Goodness no. We were lovers in high school, Michael and I.

JOY (CONT'D)

Scorching summer nights at the overlook on Edgewood Drive, he'd lean in from the shadow of his bucket seat and take me without a word. We a tangled bucking fire...it was us against the world... thirsty as the long sand trails leading like smoke into the mountain.

KAREN

Did you just make that up?

MICHAEL

That's how she talks.

PENNY

Joy, darling. You're clearly stuck in some fairy tale where all beds have four posts and the men don't have genital warts.

KAREN

Michael! What the hell is going on?

LINDSAY

That's what I want to know! I get an abrupt text for a house call: Michael Klein and, quote, "current girlfriend." Owing to our history, I agree to a private consultation. But this? I don't know what this is. Orgy? Mass killing? Parenthetically, I was smart enough to remember pepper spray, Michael.

MICHAEL

Will everyone just calm down a minute!

(to Karen)

Karen, when I look at you, I see stars. I see the dignity that comes from extensive insurance coverage. Arm in arm, I spy gallantry in the trivial. Seated together on the couch, there's no kneejerk urgency to shutter myself against the mundane.

KAREN

(gesturing around
the apartment)

What couch? Did you buy a couch?

MICHAEL

I'm talking about reveling in the ordinary! Your frustrated snorts when I've stolen the blanket. Mere baubles and inanities, surely! Yet, I'm struck ever deeper. LOVE. L.O.V.E. I see the word on jets of light and color scrawled across the sky in the ink of your skin, heart and eyes.

ROGER

Michael! I love the part where you spell out the word, LOVE. Do you mind if I steal that from you? Also can we get to it, whatever this is? I've got a painting party later.

MICHAEL

(to Roger)

...but I've felt this emotion before.

(to Karen)

In the past, I've gotten here by following my heart, following my mind, following my....

We see that Roger is projecting the large joint from his nether regions.

MICHAEL

Thanks, Roger.

Karen looks from Roger to the rest of the guests.

MICHAEL

Karen, this is Roger. Roger was a breath of fresh air who opened a whole new world to me. We were monog--semi-monogamous for 9 months in 2007.

Michael takes Karen by the hand and walks her over to Lindsay.

MICHAEL

This is Lindsay. Lindsay and I were together for three years. At one point, we were on the precipice of a very real engagement.

LINDSAY

I'd like to place you on the precipice of something very real.

KAREN

Three years? Michael, we've only been dating for six months!

MICHAEL

Lindsay is a therapist.

Lindsay reaches into her jacket pocket and pulls out a business card.

LINDSAY

Take my card. And buy my book on Amazon: "KNOWING WHEN TO SAY WTF". It covers my Michael Klein years. Michael, if this charade goes one minute over an hour, you pay double!

KAREN

You're paying her?

Michael gestures to the woman whose name tag reads, Penny.

MICHAEL

This is Penny. Penny and I were going to elope, but it didn't work out.

PENNY

Didn't work out. "I'm going to buy a pack of cigarettes across the street," he said. "Order me a Heineken." And here we are, 10 years later.

MICHAEL

Penny, you pointed a gun at my head because I got pineapples on a pizza!

PENNY

(To Karen)

Guy's a fucking asshole! He'd already eaten and I was starving. Who assumes you like pineapple?

KAREN

Me. I like pineapple on a pizza.

PENNY

(making for the
door)

Well, there you have it. Ours
was a diet of cocaine,
pornography and chardonnay. But
who can compete with pineapples?
I wouldn't hazard a guess. I
wouldn't even try. You're a
match made in mediocrity. Can I
have my \$100 now Michael Klein?

LINDSAY

100? You only promised me 50!

MICHAEL

You said that was your hourly
rate!

ROGER

Scandalous!

KAREN

(to Michael)

You haven't worked in six
months! Are you giving them my
money?

MICHAEL

(to Penny)

\$100 for one hour, Penny! That
was the agreement.

(to Karen)

And yes, I have some money!

KAREN

Where did you get the money?
Michael! What the hell is going
on?

Michael escorts Karen over to Joy.

MICHAEL

...And Joy introduced herself
already. So that's the whole
rogue's gallery.

ROGER

I like that. Roger the Rogue.
Rogue Roger? Can I be a rake? I
rather fancy that over rogue.

MICHAEL

...performing nightly at a truck
stop near you.

Michael sets up folding chairs, one for each guest, beside the kitchen table. He stands another chair by itself in front of the others, stage center.

JOY

(to Michael,
pointing at
Penny)

Now I know why her name sounded so familiar. Michael, all those summers ago, were they her panties beneath your car seat? I recall you took a different tack, positing a previous owner's indiscretion.

PENNY

(to Joy)
Yes. They were.

Michael takes the chair at stage center.

MICHAEL

Will all my exes take a seat.

JOY

(to Penny)
Were what? Yours? Or the previous owner's?

The four exes take their seats. Joy sits in the left-most chair, then Penny, then Roger, then Lindsay.

KAREN

Where am I supposed to sit?

MICHAEL

Behind me. Behind the table. The stool. That's where I need you to be. Wait...

As a bewildered Karen settles into the stool, Michael runs over and slaps a KAREN nametag on her chest, then sits back down.

ROGER

Michael, I don't know what you're up to, but it's definitely getting interesting!

Karen picks up the meat tenderizer from the table.

KAREN

Is this supposed to be a gavel?

MICHAEL

So perceptive! That's right.
You, my love, are the judge.

JOY

And the rest of us, Michael? The
jury of your peers?

MICHAEL

No. Karen's judge and jury.

KAREN

This isn't funny, Michael.

PENNY

(flashing a
switchblade)

Can I be the executioner?

KAREN

And this one's armed. Great. You
welcomed a felon into our home.

ROGER

I'll be the bondsman. James
Bondsman.

MICHAEL

No. We don't need an
executioner. Put that away,
Penny. And Roger, you're
thinking of the bailiff, not the
bondsman.

Karen strikes the table with the meat tenderizer.

KAREN

WHAT THE FUCK IS GOING ON!?!?

MICHAEL

Thank you. Let's have some
order, dammit! Your honor, I
stand before you, a man
thoroughly vexed.

LINDSAY

You're sitting, not standing.

MICHAEL

(pointing to Lindsay)
Please instruct this quack to
take 10 milligrams of something.

Karen strikes the table with the meat tenderizer again.

MICHAEL

Fine. Your honor, the witnesses arranged before you were loves of mine: they were singular and unique. They put a song in my-

Karen strikes the table with the meat tenderizer.

KAREN

Michael, I'm about three seconds from throwing this at your head, and then cutting you into little pieces.

MICHAEL

But I have a speech prepared.

Karen strikes the table with the meat tenderizer.

MICHAEL

Fair enough. Joy, why did we break up? I was madly in love with you. High school. Then off to the same university. What happened? What happened to us? What led us astray? What dimmed the-

Karen strikes the table with the meat tenderizer.

JOY

You don't remember? I pushed you away. Like all the others. We'd an innocent, nurturing love, Michael. I was ready to move forward. You were not.

MICHAEL

I don't remember any pushing, though. I remember feeling a spirited 'It's Us Against the World'...then, nothing.

JOY

I forced the issue by introducing you to my parents. It was all too much. Too much pressure. A week later, I get a Dear Joy Email from you. I tore clothes and wept for a year, but I deserved it. I crowded you. I pushed you out.

Lindsay pulls a business card from her pocket and turns to Roger.

LINDSAY
(whispering)
Can you pass this down to Joy?

MICHAEL
That day with your parents?
Huh...

PENNY
COME ON! He's a liar and a shit!
Those were MY panties. From a
previous boner. Not a previous
owner.

Karen slams the gavel.

MICHAEL
Joy. Oh Jesus. Now I remember.
It was...it was your mother.
She...Joy, it wasn't your fault
at all.

ROGER
(mouth agape)
No! You're NOT going to go there
are you?

MICHAEL
Not what I mean, Roger.

KAREN
Mr. Klein, you're withholding
evidence. The court doesn't look
favorably on that sort of thing.
The court is not looking
favorably on very much right
now.

MICHAEL
You want the truth? Ok. JOY'S
MOTHER LOOKED 100 YEARS OLD!!!

The exes gasp.

MICHAEL
That's right! She couldn't have
been a day over 40, but the
woman looked like Grandma Moses!
I knew it couldn't last! I knew
no matter how beautiful you
were, that in a few years, you'd
fossilize!

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Just like your mother! Everybody
knows white women age
dreadfully, but this was like
the fountain of youth in
reverse!

JOY

(to Michael)

You broke up with me over
melanin?

(to Penny)

And you fucked him while we were
dating?

(to Lindsay, tearing up card)

Fuck this shit! Give me that
pepper spray!

Karen slams the meat tenderizer.

KAREN

Let's move this along, people.
Next, we have Penny,
representing the homicidal drug
fiend in all of us. Penny, I
don't really know what you're
doing here. It's this court's
opinion that loaded guns are
grounds for termination.

MICHAEL

I'm sorry, your honor. I've done
a lot of soul searching since
taking the stand. And I can not,
in good conscience, hide behind
the pineapple defense. That's
not why I left you, Penny.

PENNY

It isn't?

MICHAEL

How could it be? The pineapple
incident, it's one of my best
conversation starters. No. The
truth is, I realize, I left you
because you were living in a
double-wide trailer. Remember
when I drove you home for the
first time...this was a week
before you nearly shot me.

PENNY

Yes...you left me because I was
poor?

MICHAEL

Well, it's one thing to hear
about life in a trailer. It's
something else to see one.

Penny aims her switchblade and throws it at Michael. It
misses, hitting the canvas instead.

KAREN

Damning testimony, Mr. Klein!
And bravo to you, Penny! That's
the first time something's
touched that canvas in a month!
Who's next? Aah yes, our male
subject.

ROGER

Finally! Michael, look. I'm not
like these other girls. It was
all that kidding about hair
plugs, wasn't it? I was joking!
I loved your shiny, little
keppe. I was a slave to your
keppe!

MICHAEL

Our love was deep and boundless,
Roger.

ROGER

And you know that Rogaine on
your birthday was just a gag
gift?

MICHAEL

But our breakup, that was a
practical decision. Why would I
want to be gay if I didn't have
to be? Heterosexuality may be
drab, but it's easy. Life gets
complicated. It was the
pragmatic decision, the right
decision.

Karen slams down the gavel.

KAREN

Convictions. Who needs them?

ROGER

So it wasn't the hair plugs?

KAREN

Time to testify, Lindsay.

LINDSAY

This may all seem like a joke to everyone here, but it's not to me. Our break-up was a defining moment in my life. It split time in half. Anything that occurred prior to our parting, that was one period. Anything after, another. There was a lot of soul searching and self loathing. But now, now I know the truth.

Lindsay rises to her feet.

PENNY

Hey! Why does she get to stand up?

KAREN

I'll allow it.

LINDSAY

It was that day at the nude beach. 2008. Michael has a poor self-image. To compensate, he fetishized my body. I thought that going to the nude beach would be a step toward self-actualization for him. But my idea backfired. He was consumed by all the breasts on display. And this pair...no matter how perfect, could never compete with the world of opportunity he saw that day on the beach.

Michael leaps to his feet.

MICHAEL

(excitedly)

Lindsay, you're right! It was all those tits at the beach!

LINDSAY

Well, those aren't the words I used in my book, but-

MICHAEL

But it wasn't infatuation, it was fear! Remember all those old women? That was the day I realized that breasts sour over time, and the bigger they are, the worse they get. Gnawing babies. Stretch marks. Gravity.

MICHAEL (CONT'D)

Up to that day, I thought your breasts would stay perfect forever! I'm guessing they still are, *parenthetically*. But that day at the beach opened my eyes. No matter the exercise regiment we worked on to hold back the sands of time, your beautiful breasts had already peaked.

LINDSAY

That's why we broke up? Who are you?

KAREN

I've got a name for your next book: Drowning in the Shallow End!

Lindsay walks slowly toward the door, and Michael trails after her, pulling money from his pocket as he crosses the room.

MICHAEL

Lindsay! Thank you so much! This has been a breakthrough! Here's your 50! Not bad for 15 minutes of work right? And where's my manners. Give me a few of your cards! I'll hand them out!

She leaves without a word.

MICHAEL

(standing in the open doorway)
Well, that's it! Everybody! It's time to go. This court is adjourned.

Michael retrieves the switchblade from the floor as returns everyone begins getting to their feet, and heading toward the door.

JOY

Surely, that's a decision for the judge?

MICHAEL

(handing \$100 and the switchblade to Penny)
Penny, I'm indebted to you.

Penny takes a swipe at Michael with her knife, but he gets out of the way quickly enough, and Penny exits.

MICHAEL

Joy, don't ever change! You agreed to do this for free right?

JOY

I wish you'd sit on the floor so I could shit on your head, Michael.

Joy exits.

MICHAEL

(to Roger)

Roger, it was my great pleasure.

ROGER

I don't get anything?

MICHAEL

You offered to pay me!

Roger exits, leaving Michael and Karen alone in the room. Karen stares absently at the meat tenderizer.

MICHAEL

Karen! Thank you so much for your patience! We have so much to talk about! Let's you and me smoke a joint and celebrate.

KAREN

No. I don't think so. I'm leaving, Michael. But I'll be back in an hour. That gives you an hour to put all your shit in a bag and get the fuck out of my life.

MICHAEL

Karen! Don't you see? It wasn't me at all. It was them. And most importantly, these past transgressions had nothing to do with us and what lies ahead!

Karen slams the gavel one last time, and gets to her feet.

MICHAEL

But I'm finally ready!

Karen exits, leaving Michael by himself. He sits behind the kitchen table, stares thoughtfully at the gavel a moment, then shoves the joint in his mouth, and dials the phone.

MICHAEL

Roger! Hi! So when are you going to that party? Really? Sure. I know...yes, but...alright, well. Roger, what if I just wear a hat?

THE END