

A Momentary Lapse Of Comedy

A Play By

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Cast

Miriam

Mid-40's African American female. Michael's wife. Attractive

Michael

Mid-40's African American male. Miriam's husband. Attractive.

Roscoe

Mid-40's African American male. Rachel's husband. Attractive.

Rachel

Mid-40's African American female. Roscoe's wife. Attractive.

Flight Attendant Mid-20's Male. Attractive.

Setting

A row of airplane seats that face the audience. Ambient plane noise (planes taking off, landing) can be heard in the background. This noise is optional.

Time

Present

(Lights up on a row on an airplane. We see Miriam, Roscoe and Rachel. Michael is not present. All are enjoying a layover in the flight. Each shows the glazed look of prolonged airline travel)

Rachel

Now THAT, was a great trip.

Roscoe

Best time we ever had in California. BY. FAR.

Miriam

Everything went as planned No surprises, no weird, outta-the-blue mess.

Rachel

Just a really, really good time.

Miriam

Now that's what we work HARD for.

Roscoe

What we work DAMN HARD for.

Rachel

Ditto that. How long did they say this layover would be?

Miriam

An hour and a half, and I guess they mean what they say.

Roscoe

Lettum layover long as they want. Nobody gotta “gas up n go” on my account. Lettum check every thermometer. Pop open a fresh can of Valvoline. I want that engine to purr like a pussycat.

(All Laugh)

Rachel

Michael did go to the bathroom on THIS plane, right?

(All laugh)

Miriam

My husband is just so ‘special.’ He could have gotten lost, taken a wrong turn, anything’s possible with Michael.

(Laughs all around, then a pause)

Rachel

(To Miriam)

So Lynn.....what’d you think of Michael doing stand-up comedy?

(Miriam has “deer in the headlights” reaction)

Miriam

(Very deliberate)

How did I Like/WHO/doing/stand-up/comedy?

Rachel

Oh.

(Her hubby Roscoe --- surprised --- throws his wife "the look, she hesitates)

.....I thought you knew.

Miriam

Did Michael go someplace and do stand-up comedy?

Roscoe

(Gives Rachel a longer "look")

Miriam

Rachel, I'm asking you a question: did Michael go out and do stand-up somewhere?

Rachel

Miriam, this was a while ago.

Miriam

Roscoe?

Roscoe

It's like Miriam said, this was a while ago.

(Making excuse)

Not sure exactly when --- I'm no good with dates.

Miriam

Why didn't anybody tell me?

Rachel

He probably just forgot.

Roscoe

I forgot.

Miriam

Roscoe took him to out to that “Laff-A-Lot” place in Catonsville.

Miriam

WHY DIDN'T ANYBODY TELL ME?!

Roscoe

Miriam told me not to tell you.

Miriam

(Now throws her husband “the look” back)
Tell the truth!

Roscoe

Ok, maybe.....Miriam had nothing to do with it. Maybe it was Mike who told us not to tell you.

Miriam

(Growing impatient, upset)
You told Michael not to tell me?!

Roscoe

Because you’d make him nervous.

Rachel

He didn’t want Michael to freeze up.

Miriam

So ROSCOE decided not to tell MICHAEL’S WIFE because she makes her husband nervous.

Roscoe

Miriam c'mon now, don't make a federal case ---

Miriam

--- C'mon NOTHING!

Roscoe

You know you don't think Mike's funny.

Rachel

Miriam---Roscoe just wanted Michael to feel comfortable.

Miriam

Rachel---your husband is not judge and jury!

Roscoe

Do you think Mike's funny?

Miriam

It's not your business!

Roscoe

You DON'T think he's funny! Maybe that factored into things.

Miriam

(Now truly miffed)

If my husband decides to perform onstage--- his wife is the one who gets told, Roscoe!

Roscoe

Michael's his own man.

Miriam

THIS IS NOT YOUR TERRITORY!

Rachel

(Looking around the plane, whispers)

Miriam you're getting loud. People are starting to stare....

Miriam

(To Roscoe)

You overstepped!

Roscoe

Take it up with Michael--

Miriam

I'M TAKING IT UP WITH YOU!

Rachel

Miriam I don't want to get thrown off this plane.

Miriam

I don't care what anybody wants! My husband did stand-up and nobody told his wife.

Roscoe

ASK YOUR HUSBAND WHY HE DIDNT INVITE YOU! That's your business.

Rachel

(Now very attentive to passenger activity)

Somebody's talking to the stewardess.

Miriam

RIGHT! It's my business! Not yours.

Rachel

(Firm)

I'm not spending the night in Phoenix, Arizona over this foolishness.

Miriam

Roscoe don't step foot in my house, don't call me, don't e-mail me---

Roscoe

Why you taking it out on me?! It's Michael you need to be chattin up!

Miriam

I'M TALKING TO YOU!

(Flight attendant appears)

Flight Attendant

Hi there. I'm going to have to ask you to lower your voices. We'll be re-boarding in 15 minutes and we take take these kinds of disturbances very seriously now.

Rachel

(Polite back)

I'm sorry. We're just having a little misunderstanding.

Miriam

(Also polite)

Yes,. You see this gentleman did something incredibly stupid, and I was just ***correcting him***.

Flight Attendant

Well, I hope things get ironed out and you can enjoy the rest of your stay with us today.

(Exits)

(A long pause between the Roscoe, Rachel and Miriam. Finally, Michael enters, returns to his seat. He's quite upbeat)

Michael

(Amused, upbeat)

Man-Oh-Man, why's it seem like the bigger the plane the smaller the bathrooms?

(Pauses, notices the very present chill in the air)

I knew this vacation was too good to be true---who dropped the bomb on everybody?!

(Pause. Miriam looks at Michael long and hard before she speaks)

Miriam

Michael. Did you do comedy?

Michael

Not me.

Roscoe

She knows.

Miriam

You went and did comedy.

Michael

I did comedy.

Miriam

And didn't tell me.

Michael

(Now senses gravity of situation)

Can we discuss this at home?

Roscoe

(Mock caution)

May not make it home.

Rachel

(Admonishes)

Miriam

You decided to go and do---

Michael

YES---I made my own decision, HELL YES!

Miriam

And didn't tell your wife.

Michael

This is all about THAT----

(To himself, curses his luck)

Kiss my ass.

(Jumps in with both feet)

So this is the bomb that dropped? "Michael did comedy?" ---I
come back from the bathroom and BOOM/SHAKA/LAKA!

(To all within earshot)

AMBUSHED/OVER/DOING/COMEDY!

Ain't this some Scra-diddy!

Miriam

Michael I wanted to be there!

Michael

Honey, I love you with all my heart----but frankly-----you don't think I'm funny.

Roscoe

Bingo!

Rachel

(Hits Roscoe)

Miriam

That was a selfish act----and I can't believe you'd shut me out like that.

Michael

I cannot believe you don't think I'm funny.

Roscoe

True Dat.

Miriam

(To Roscoe)

SHUT UP!

(Flight Attendant returns)

Flight Attendant

Hi again everyone. I can hear you from the front, and I'm going to have to ask you to step outside the plane. If you don't I'll be forced to inform the Air Marshall.

Rachel

THEM TWO can step outside the plane, I'm going home!

Miriam

I'm sorry again. My husband *ALSO* did something incredibly stupid.

Flight Attendant

Are you correcting him too?

Miriam

Yes I am.

Flight Attendant

Will you step this way please?

Rachel

We're fine. Honestly. Just one of those marriage things. Really. Everything's OK.

Flight Attendant

I'm going to have to ask you to---

Michael

Really, everything's under control. We apologize. We're just ready to get home, that's all. We just came back from a wonderful vacation in California, we did some hiking, biking, swimming ---and we're just tired.

(Make with the charm to Attendant)

Can I get you anything? Coffee? Tea? A double espresso?

Flight Attendant
(Hesitates, then a smile comes through)
 Your vacation sounds fantastic. Great food?

MIRIAM
 Fantastic.

Flight Attendant
 Oh it sounds wonderful.

(Michael, Miriam, Rachel & Roscoe all nod agreement)

Flight Attendant
 So I'm assuming everything's fine, and there'll be no more disturbances? Once re-boarding start we absolutely can't allow this. So are we all on the same page?

(Michael, Miriam, Rachel & Roscoe all give nods of agreement)

Flight Attendant
 Fine. Thank you for your cooperation.
(She exits)

(Michael, Miriam, Rachel & Roscoe all stare straight ahead)

Miriam
(Rises, moves out of the row)
 I'm getting off this plane.

Michael
 Miriam. Miriam---please sit down.

Miriam
 It's the principle, Michael.

Michael
Principle? What are you talking---

Miriam
You betrayed me.

(Pause. Miriam's words hang in the air)

Michael
(Now, Michael rises, moves to her, bit more contrite)
Please...let's just sit down so we can get home.
(He helps her back to her seat. He returns to his)

(A beat passes)

Miriam
You NEVER EVER heard me say you were not funny.

Michael
With all due respect, 10 years of NO LAUGHS said it for you.

Miriam
You never heard the words "Michael you're not funny".

Michael
Miriam. You/never/laugh.

Roscoe
(“Period”)
PURR-REE-ID.

Miriam

(To Roscoe)
You want me to get ugly?

Rachel

---Not with my husband.

Miriam

---Then take him out of the equation.

Rachel

---*At least he's funny!*

Michael

---That's uncalled for.

Rachel

---*I called for it!*

Roscoe

(Amused)
Catfight!

Rachel

(Punches Roscoe hard in shoulder)

Roscoe

(Mock Dramatic)
Ouch ----"Man Down!"

Miriam

(Punches Michael)
I can't believe you wouldn't tell me.

Michael

(As Michael speaks, he rises from his seat and lights dim completely out on the others. A spotlight appears and he moves into it.

I made a move. So what?! It was something to try. It was open mic night, and I thought I'd give it a shot. I've been to a couple open mics when not a soul was laughing. Thought I couldn't do no worse.

(Now performing at the club. He is now a Comedian at the Club. His style is part Bernie Mac, part Andrew Dice Clay)
"How's everybody doing tonight? Everybody chill? You know everyday life has become some rigid-ass shit. Go to an expensive organic market. Look down the any aisle. Women are studying ingredients like they're unraveling Tutankhamun's DNA.....

(The "audience" --- consisting of Miriam, Rachel and Roscoe and mimicking classic comedy club laughter in the background --- howls)

They're standing there with kids crying "Mommy, Mommy let's go Mommy" And Mommy's comparing sodium in chicken broth bouillion vs. chicken broth. These are the last women you would EVER approach. These women are UP-TO-HERE with RIGHTEOUSNESS. They may as well be marching with Abraham, Martin and John. This is the ultimate Nutritional "Do Gooder" Moment in their entire day. And they're DO-GOODING like a Sonavubitch. Aisle after aisle, face after face --- "Don't Fuck With Me I'm Uncovering Every Bogus Food Myth In My Path!"

(More "audience" applause)

*And since when did Starbucks become the Church of the Almighty Laptop? I've been in a couple Starbucks where --- once again --- that same face is on everybody's face. **"Can't you see how hard I'm working?! Can't you see how dedicated I am to. CAN'T YOU SEE HOW HARD MY MIND IS WORKING --- I CAN'T DO THIS AT HOME?!"** If a tree falls in the forest, does*

Michael (Cont)

it make a sound --- if a bright idea happens at home and nobody's around, did it even happen?"

(More "applause")

Why do I think that walking and cursing on your phone are now one in the same.

Walking and Cursing. You seen 'em. You know who I'm talkin bout. Holdin the phone like it's a landing strip....

(Imitates)

"That bitch call my child into the office talkin bout his attitude, talkin bout he always late, talkin how he ain't never got no lunch, how he done stole some lil boy's lunch and now he all suspended and can't come back till his momma show up.....I was like bitch-please, my child ain't done a thing I ain't done when I was in school!"

(Applause now rises, and the Spotlight dims, as Michael "leaves" the club and returns to his seat on the plane)

(Pause)

Roscoe

Michael did anybody laugh?

Michael

Thank you for asking. Yes they did laugh.

Miriam

I don't care. I want to be there if nobody laughs.

CAPTAIN'S VOICE

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is your Captain speaking. We'll be leaving Arizona right around our scheduled departure time, and this will be a non-stop flight to Baltimore, Maryland. The Baltimore weather is sunny, and a not too hot 70 degrees. We anticipate no delays and if you're up and about the aircraft, please return to your seats. It looks like we've had quite a few cancellations for our trip to Baltimore. Our re-boarding is over, and we'll be ready for lift off in just a few minutes. Thanks for flying with us today, and enjoy your trip."

(Pause. Miriam, still upset, now reads a magazine. Rachel and Roscoe whisper to each other)

Michael

(Tries breaking ice)

Bet you don't think this situation's funny either.

Miriam

(Stares at Michael)

Michael

It wasn't a conspiracy, Miriam. I just went for it.

Miriam

If you love your wife. You'd want to see her happy.

(Pauses)

That's all I'm saying.

(Michael now looks straight ahead, Miriam reads magazine. Rachel puts her head on Roscoe's shoulder, they continue to whisper)

Roscoe

(Aside)
Leave it to a Sista....

Rachel/Miriam

(To Roscoe)
WHAT!

Roscoe

(To Miriam)
Since you ain't really behind your man, somebody gotta be.

(Miriam, stunned)

Rachel

(Aside to Roscoe)
You need to exit this conversation.....

Roscoe

Miriam makin this all about her. A white woman wouldn't have made the brother feel that way. She woulda been in his corner. I'm happy Michael made an independent move.

(All are silent)

Miriam

(Both Miriam and Rachel are shocked)
I've never heard you say anything like this before Roscoe. But now you've opened up your bigoted, ugly, disgusting mind for everybody to see, Roscoe. What you just said says all anybody needs to know about how you feel about black women --- even though you're married to one!

ROSCOE

(Proud)

Truth need be told. Sistas can drag a brother down. That's a fact.

MIRIAM

Oh my Lord, what a racist mouthful

Rachel

I absolutely CANNOT believe what you're saying.

Roscoe

Truth need be told.

Miriam

I didn't hear truth, I heard a racist.

Roscoe

(Unawares)

Who a racist?!

Rachel

You are!

Roscoe

Now you really trippin cause **black people can't be racist.**

Rachel

Is that the way you really feel?

Michael

Think long and hard 'fore you answer my brother.

Roscoe

Long n' hard nuthin! Everybody know black women love
runnin down a brother. Everybody know the real deal. I hear
the sistas talkin, yappin ---

(Imitates)

---Complainin, whining, bitchin to your girlfriends --- There
ain't no pleasin 'em.

Michael

(To Miriam and Rachel)

Look --- he don't speak for me.

Roscoe

Yall know I'm right. That's what make all these brothers leave
after they get somebody pregnant. They can't deal with that
black female personality.

Miriam

(Outraged)

It was a black woman gave you life.

Rachel

Roscoe, I never knew you carried round that much hatred.

(To Michael)

And this is your friend?

Michael

I've never been part of that.

Rachel

I can't believe I'm living with such a sick RACIST mind!

(Stares at Roscoe)

Roscoe

(Her stare catches him, and he awkwardly looks away. He takes a moment and realizes his position. He tries to soften his stance. He speaks very hesitantly)

Hey.....that's not, necessarily, all me talking ---- that's just --- stuff I --- stuff that's out there. I'm just repeating --- things I mighta --- probably --- picked-up. Somewhere.

Rachel

(Still staring at Roscoe)

And can't believe I'm married to such a sick racist mentality...

(Pause)

10 years of marriage and now --- your true colors.

(Pause. All four now stare straight ahead)

Roscoe

I'm not no racist. I told you: **black people can't be---**

Rachel

Apparently they can! You are, Roscoe. In your heart of hearts you just put it all on display.

(Pause. All four continue staring straight ahead)

Roscoe

I be DAMN if somebody think Roscoe is racist. Somebody be out there ever-lovin mind to call me a racist.

Rachel

What you said about black women is pure racist, from the inside out!

Roscoe

I'm just reporting what I hear. That's all. Black women might got a problem, is alls I'm saying. Don't go hatin on Roscoe. Black women got themselves a little bad image thing.

Miriam

I cannot understand why the good lord gave you a mouth, if this is the voice that comes out of it.

Rachel

(To Miriam and Michael)

Let me apologize.

Roscoe

(Dismay)

Who you apologizing for?

(Pause, several long beats pass)

Michael

I know why you wanted me to do comedy, Roscoe.

Roscoe

(Now Upset)

Excuse me for encouraging you to stand tall. That's on me.
What the hell was I thinking? What the hell was I ever propping you up for?

Michael

You know why you pushed me out on that stage. You wanted it more than me, you wanted it before I even gave it a thought...

(Once again, lights dim out on Roscoe, Miriam and Rachel and once again Michael is a Comedian stepping into the spotlight)

"Know what disappoints me the most when I see people out on dates. Men. The behavior of men. I see all these pretty women, in pretty dresses --- and the guy they with has on jeans and that backward-ass baseball cap. Ladies, if the man you out with keeps on that fashion-forward Cap from the 1990's, just leave. Just get up out the booth and Uber you way home. Cause the rest of his single guy bad habits is on the way. Won't a door get open for you, he'll inhale his food, WON'T use a napkin and will staredown his iPhone all through your delightful table talk.....

(His "Audience" again roars with laughter)

And somebody answer me this.....is there anything more abusive on television than a Chef on a reality show? Mannnnnn, they're cussin up a storm, turning beet red in the face, screaming, dumping food in the trash: "DID YOU TASTE YOUR RISSOTO? IT'S TASTELESS! YOUR PRESENTATION IS SLOPPY! YOUR TECHNIQUE IS LAZY! NOW GET THE FUCK OUTTA MY FACE YOU NO-TALENT COW PIE!

(Pause)

And what's the poor contestant come back with?

(Ever-so-humble)

-----*"Yes Chef."*

YOUR COOKING SUCKS! IT'S INEDIBLE! I WOULDN'T LET YOU HANDLE MY CUTLERY! I WOULDN'T LET YOU FILL AN ICE TRAY"

----- *"Yes Chef."*

(He bows repeatedly, the Audience roars)

(Pause)

One final thought: Perfume.....Cologne. A beautiful women

MICHAEL (*Cont*)

OUT enjoying the nightlife, running through a castle, speeding in a jaguar --- a man's face appears, he's fallen under her spell. She laughs. We see clothing drop. ***Live the fantasy.***

(Pause)

A beautiful man OUT enjoying the nightlife, running through a castle, speeding in a jaguar. A woman's face appears, she's fallen under his spell. He laughs. We see clothing unloosened. ***Live the fantasy.*** Question: If both fantasies take you to the same place, give me the fragrance that doesn't. You've been a great audience. Thank you all very much."

(There's a pause, and this time he's met with a "quieter" applause. Michael exits, and moves back into the Plane. Lights return to normal)

Miriam

I can't get off this plane fast enough.

Roscoe

I'm NOT apologizing and I'm NOT back-tracking!

Rachel

(To Roscoe)

Go sit somewhere else. Go on --- go!

Michael

(To Roscoe)

Best you do.

Roscoe

(Rises, indignant)

Fine. F-Yall then! Don't gotta be where I'm not welcome.

(Stares at Michael, Sarcasm)

I'm so sorry I EVER tried to help you out Michael. Show the world what a funny man you had living inside. I'm sooooo sorry I thought you wanted to step out.

Michael

And I'm sorry about you, Roscoe.

Roscoe

Wasn't me. That's for damn sure. Wouldn't nobody hadda push me. That's where you n' me differ. I'ma self-starter. Comes easy. Natural. I got my own engine. If I wanted Roscoe out there --- you best believe --- I'da had the courage --- ***You best believe----***

Michael

Best believe what?!

Roscoe

WHO'S the one always sour-pussin over havin the voice for comedy, but not the guts. WHO'S always lamenting about the world not getting to hear your voice.

Michael

YES! TELL EVERYBODY WHO! LET'S HEAR IT OUT LOUD!

(Pause)

Tell us who.

(Dramatic Pause)

Roscoe

(To Michael)

It was always YOUR fantasy to get onstage. YOUR fantasy to entertain. YOUR fantasy to show everybody how SMART you are, CLEVER you are.

Michael

(Whispers to Roscoe)

Sounds like you and I have that same fantasy, Roscoe.

(Pause, whispers to him)

But tell me.....who's got the different fragrance?

(And then Michael nudges Roscoe into the Comedy Spotlight. Lights dim out on Michael, Rachel and Miriam)

Roscoe

(Roscoe is stunned by the shift into the light. He blinks, he shifts his weight from side-to-side, the light hurts his eyes, he loses his swagger)

Comes easy.....comes.....natural....

(He clears his throat, clears it again, he tries to speak but words are hollow)

If I....really.....**If I really.....IF I REALLY WANTED TO.....**

(His expression turns to fear and panic, he tries to speak but nothing comes out. Trapped in a bad silent movie. He just stands staring the light. Ever so slowly, he drops his head in defeat)

(Slowly, the Spotlight around him shrinks, smaller and smaller till finally it disappears)

THE END

