

THE KILLING OF MICHAEL X
A NEW FILM BY CELIA WALLACE

By
Cory Hinkle

The Killing of Michael X was developed at the 2010 Bay Area Playwrights Festival and the Playwrights' Foundation's 2009-10 "In the Rough Series." The play received a workshop production at the 2011 Brown/Trinity Playwrights Rep. It received its world premiere at Jackalope Theatre (Chicago, IL) in March 2014.

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Characters

CELIA – A 17 year-old filmmaker. Has a movie running in her head.

RANDY – A poor boy from the other side of the tracks. Looks a bit like James Dean.

JACKIE – Celia’s step-mom. A concerned housewife.

BOB – Celia’s father. PR lawyer for an important oil company. Forgetting.

REYNOLDS – A wounded detective in love with the cinema.

REYNOLDS also plays the RADIO ANNOUNCER, THE MEDICAL INDUSTRY TV FLACK, and JW HOSKINS.

JACKIE plays CHERYL and CHRISSY.

BOB plays MITCHELL SMITH and FRANK IN THE FIELD.

Setting

Somewhere in Middle America.

Notes

- The play should be performed without an intermission.
- The set should be as simple as possible – it is completely struck near play’s end.
- The filmed sections should always be triggered by the action on stage.

Q: What is your greatest ambition in life?

A: To become immortal, and then die.

– Godard, from *Breathless*

The theater lights dim as movie music plays and then projected –

Celia Wallace.

She holds up an index finger like a gun and points it into the camera.

With her other hand, she runs her thumb across the top of her lip like Jean Seberg at the end of Godard's Breathless.

The image of Celia and the movie music fades as the sound of radio static and the beeping sound of a Special News Bulletin.

Lights on a RADIO ANNOUNCER wearing a suit, a piece of paper in his hand.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Hello, ladies and gentlemen – Wait, are we on, Ralph? *(holds his finger to his ear)* What's that? We're on? Hello, ladies 'n gentleman our listening audience tonight. Ralph tells me you're out there now, hearing my voice in places I can only imagine – your car, your kitchen, or you're sitting on your back porch hearing me while looking up at the stars, or at the falling satellites. Your mind is like unexposed film my voice is like light. Can you hear me? Can you hear me quite well? I hope you can, listeners, because the news I bring tonight is both very important and very, very bad.

He pulls a crumpled piece of paper out of his jacket.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

I just got a fax here in the office from Homeland Security, straight from the top, Janet Napolitano is the woman's name. It says here two teenagers armed with semi-automatic handguns have shot and killed the CEO of a major American Corporation.

A light on CHERYL, the Style Consultant.

CHERYL

It's awful news, Jack.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Our very own Style Consultant, Cheryl, joins us now.

CHERYL

It's a terrible, terrible day.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

For CEOs everywhere I'd say.

CHERYL

Indeed.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

And you should know ladies 'n gentlemen – if you approach these two killers, approach as if their faces are the mugs of rabid wolves.

CHERYL

That's right, Jack.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Though we admit, it's no easy feat – they are armed and dangerous, but as Cheryl can confirm, quite attractive.

CHERYL

This little murder mystery is cast just like a reality TV show, but this time it's really real, the real McCoy as they say, this *IS* reality, folks!

RADIO ANNOUNCER

So we've actually *seen* these two young killers?

CHERYL

Surveillance cameras show a young girl with perfect skin and a boy with a cute button face, which makes you want to kiss his rosy cheeks, even though you know he's a cold-blooded killer.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

But *why* would any American want to kill an innocent man while dressed up as a Reality TV Star?

CHERYL *(suddenly, very dark)*

Jack, our society is obsessed with death and killing.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Um, okay, Cheryl ...

CHERYL

Both in our desire to watch death dramatized and our firm denial that it will ever happen to *us*.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

But *why?* *Why* was this innocent man *killed*?

CHERYL

Well Jack, that's not my expertise. But if you want to talk about their stylish accessories? When Celia Wallace killed Michael X, she wore some rockin' blood red leather pumps –

RADIO ANNOUNCER

All right, thanks for the analysis, Cheryl!

Lights out on CHERYL.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Let's go out to Frank in the Field!

Lights on FRANK IN THE FIELD.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
Frank, where are you now?

FRANK IN THE FIELD
I'm right outside the house of Celia Wallace's parents.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
What's the word?

FRANK IN THE FIELD
On what?

RADIO ANNOUNCER
What?

Slight Pause.

FRANK IN THE FIELD
Are you there, Jack?

RADIO ANNOUNCER
Yes! Frank! Do we know *why* she killed this man!?!

FRANK IN THE FIELD
Michael X?

RADIO ANNOUNCER
Of course! Yes! Michael X.

FRANK IN THE FIELD
It was grief, Jack.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
What? Grief?

FRANK IN THE FIELD
Sources close to the killer (who incidentally I hear is *quite* attractive) tell me her grief has driven her to want *revenge* for the death of her brother.

RADIO ANNOUNCER
But what does Michael X have to do with *that*?

FRANK IN THE FIELD
Michael X manufactured the drug that killed him!

RADIO ANNOUNCER

So you're telling me that people are beginning to make a direct correlation between the actions of American corporations and their own everyday lives?

FRANK IN THE FIELD

I'm afraid so.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Good God. Thank you Frank. And keep us posted.

Lights out on FRANK IN THE FIELD.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Ladies and gentlemen, sometimes occurrences so heinous and strange happen in America that not even the journalistic machine I'm a proud member of can possibly understand what lies beneath them, but this much, to me, is certain: if an upstanding citizen, the CEO of one of our nation's largest pharmaceutical companies can be gunned down in his own hard-earned mansion, we're all goin' straight to hell.

He looks at the Homeland Security memo again.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

But back to this memo from Homeland Security. According to Ms. Napolitano, this duo may look disaffected and without political motive but it seems they *do* have a cause. They sent a letter scrawled in the wealthy man's blood to the Herald News-Record. Here it is, read by our own news reporter, Mitchell Smith. Are you there, Mitch?

A light on MITCHELL SMITH.

He holds a grizzly letter drawn in blood. His hands shake.

MITCHELL SMITH

Yeah ... Yeah, I'm here.

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Go ahead 'n read it, Mitch.

MITCHELL SMITH

Dear America, if you continue to recklessly kill our innocent young men, we will kill the denizens of America's top two percent one by one.

In other words –

This. Is. The. Beginning.

Loud ROCK AND ROLL and CREDITS are projected –

*The Killing of Michael X
 Shot, Edited, Directed and Starring
 Celia Wallace
 With Able Assistance from Randy
 (That Kid Down the Street Whose Parents Died)
 And Special Thanks to Jackie and Bob
 And Even Detective Reynolds, You Asshole.*

*Music cuts out
 As Celia's "film" (actually, the film running in her head) is projected –*

RANDY drives a stolen Lexus fast down the back roads of America.

CELIA rides shotgun.

They are made up to look like reality TV stars.

*The film looks cheaply made, but has an amateur charm like a conscious
 throwback to a late sixties noir in grainy digital video.*

It's like Arthur Penn's BONNIE AND CLYDE made by a high schooler.

The news report continues, now in the car onscreen.

RANDY ON FILM
 Can't ya turn that off!?!

CELIA ON FILM
 Didn't ya hear? They read my letter!

She hits the ceiling of the car's interior.

CELIA ON FILM
 YEEEEEEAAAHHHH, motherfuckers!!!!!!! Take that!!!!!

RANDY ON FILM
 I can't listen to this!

CELIA ON FILM (yelling out the window)
We're the ones did it! We're the ones killed that fat bastard, so come 'n get us – !

RANDY ON FILM
 Celia!

CELIA ON FILM (back in the car, to Randy)
 The whole world's gonna know what we've done and after they do they're gonna –

RANDY ON FILM *(losing it)*
 TURN IT OFF!!!

He reaches over but she pushes him back to the wheel. The station cuts to a station break, "This is WKXY, Middle America's Sexiest Talk and Pop Rock!" Then, BONNIE AND CLYDE by Serge Gainsbourg comes on.

The sound of a cop siren. RANDY looks in the rearview.

RANDY ON FILM
 Shit!

A cop car flies over the highway and down a dirt road.

RANDY ON FILM
 I told ya they'd catch us!

CELIA ON FILM
 He wasn't for us.

RANDY ON FILM
 But the next one's gonna be!

CELIA ON FILM
 Cool off –

RANDY ON FILM
 And now they're talkin' about roadblocks 'n that we're some kinda terrorists dressed up as reality TV stars –

CELIA ON FILM
 They're too stupid and slow to ever get us.

RANDY ON FILM
 But where we goin'!? We can't run all over the country dodgin' roadblocks, runnin' up 'n down 'n back again! Are we gonna run forever!?! WE CAN'T! *Where's it GONNA END?*

CELIA ON FILM
 Shut it Jake, you're hysterical.

RANDY ON FILM
 No, I'm, I'm just, I feel so. I feel *terrible*.

CELIA ON FILM
 What the hell for?

RANDY ON FILM
 Killing that man, I just –

CELIA ON FILM

Think of all the thousands of people he killed.

RANDY ON FILM

But I never *seen* a man get shot and it's sad ... He's just ... He's *dead*.

CELIA ON FILM

But he don't know that, does he?

RANDY ON FILM

Yeah sure, but –

CELIA ON FILM

He don't know a damn thing. He's deader 'an a doornail, deader 'an driftwood, deader 'an candle wax, deader 'an dirt. He's dead and there's nothing *sad* about it cause the dead don't *know* anything at all

Something disturbed passes over Celia's face.

The camera zooms slowly into a close-up. She's thinking about someone else now. She's thinking about her brother, Roger.

The camera stops, close-up on her face.

CELIA ON FILM

He's dead.

RANDY ON FILM

Yeah, that's what I said.

CELIA ON FILM

No, my brother. He's ... No. *No!* He can't be dead! This can't be true! None of this is true!

The film abruptly cuts out as Bonnie and Clyde by Serge Gainsbourg Plays LOUD and fills the theater.