

Accidents Happen

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Cast of Characters

Michael Riggett: 21 years old, senior in college, actuarial science major, a planner, cooks

Charlie Park: 20 years old, senior in college, film studies major, Michael's friend, not a planner by any definition, trying his hand at stand-up

Setting

The kitchen of Michael and Charlie's apartment in Evanston, Illinois. The kitchen consists of an island counter (which Michael uses for cooking) and a back counter with a sink (toward stage right). The far counter should essentially be shaped like an upside down L from the perspective of the audience, with the island in the crux of the L-shape. A stool sits on the side of the island counter facing away from the kitchen, toward stage left.

Note on setting: for production limitations, the sink does not need to be a working sink, it could just as easily be represented with sound effects, like running water and a garbage disposal.

Open on the compact, close-quarters of a kitchen in a three bedroom apartment. MICHAEL leans over an island counter, holding a sharp, sleek chopping knife, brand new, balanced in his hand above a head of lettuce. Other ingredients lie about the table. He begins to chop the lettuce with, methodically moving the knife back and forth across a wooden cutting board, about 11 by 9 inches. CHARLIE enters from stage left. He drinks from a mug and takes a seat across the counter from Michael.

CHARLIE (*gesturing at the ingredients*)

What's this for?

MICHAEL

A salad.

Pause. Charlie looks at him expectantly, Michael sighs.

Southwest chicken salad. (*Beat*) It looked good.

CHARLIE

You gonna have any leftovers?

MICHAEL

I dunno,/ probably.

CHARLIE

/ 'cuz if you do. (he raises his eyebrows/nods as a hint) What's in it? Chicken, I'm guessing? Lettuce?

MICHAEL

Mm.

CHARLIE

What else?

MICHAEL (*setting the knife down*)

Can't you go bother Eric? I have to focus. This (*gestures at the meal*) takes focus.

CHARLIE

Your salad takes focus? (*exhale of laughter*) Eric's at his chem lab. He won't be back for another hour, I think.

Michael washes a bell pepper in the sink behind him.

MICHAEL

(*mutters*) Jesus. (*normal voice*) Kay, what about your set tonight, huh? Aren't you opening or something? You could get there early.

CHARLIE

(shakes head) If I'm too early I overthink it. You wanna come this time? Eric and Tania and Josh are.

MICHAEL

That's okay. I'm busy. *(gestures at his salad)*

CHARLIE

I can see that, Gordon Ramsey. *(Charlie laughs at his joke. Pause.)* New knife?

MICHAEL

Yeah. I had to throw out the old one. It was chipping.

CHARLIE

That's a super nice one though.

MICHAEL

Mm.

CHARLIE

(reaching toward it) You get it at that fancy place?

MICHAEL

Yup *(Charlie grabs it)* —hey, I need that!

CHARLIE

(admiring it) Yooo! Dude. This is a good knife! *(slices the air)* This one of those Japanese kinds?

Shit dude. *(pretending to stab the air)* This thing is fuckin' sharp. "Thaht's a knoife". *(laughs)* This could go right fuckin' through somebody. *En Garde! Allez!*

No, I'm not drunk.

MICHAEL

Charlie! I need that.

Yeah—be careful with it, it's not—
Jesus Christ man! Stop!

It's—
Calm down, Zorro, just gimme the--

Are you drunk?! *(pause)* You fucking are!
Give me the knife back!

CHARLIE

Like hell. This is *(stabs the knife again, closer to Michael)* dope!

MICHAEL

Watch it!

CHARLIE

Here. Here! Gimme that pepper. Imma throw it in the air and try and cut it in half!

Michael reaches for the pepper, trying to move it away from Charlie, and Charlie attempts to cut it in his hand. Michael drops the pepper and retracts his hand.

MICHAEL

The hell's wrong with you? You're going to cut someone. Put the knife down.

Michael makes a step toward Charlie.

CHARLIE

Allez!

He points the knife at Michael. Michael grabs at it, and Charlie jabs. Michael swiftly grabs the cutting board and throws it at Charlie, who dodges, falling back toward the back counter of the kitchen. Charlie stumbles, catching himself on the counter and leaning into his knife-holding hand. He emits a sharp noise and falls behind the bar counter.

MICHAEL

Now give me the knife back. It's not a toy, dude. You said it yourself, it's sharp. It's.

He stops, staring down at where Charlie has fallen.

You okay? I—sorry I threw it at you but I told you to cut it out...

He begins to look concerned.

Hey, is—

It clicks. Michael takes a step back and bumps into the back counter. It startles him, and he whips around to see who he's run into. Nobody. His attention returns to Charlie. His hands go to his forehead.

MICHAEL

Oh, no. No. I. I.

He bends down and places a hand against Charlie's neck (unseen behind the counter). He stands. There's a smear of blood on his hand.

MICHAEL (*breathless*)

Shit. Shit. I. (*stammering*) Nine-one... no, I. That'll. Shit.

He takes out his phone and dials three numbers, 9-1-1, and stares at the screen, debating whether or not to call it. He sets it down suddenly, rubbing his eyes. He quivers a bit, unsure of what to do. He picks up the phone again, dials a different number, longer. He sets the phone down again. He looks up, casting a fretful, almost dubious glance at where Charlie lies on the floor. His eyes widen suddenly and he sets down the phone and rushes over.

MICHAEL

No, no no no no no. Not on the—

Michael grabs Charlie by the shoulders and begins to drag him by his

arms out from behind the bar counter. Charlie's shirt is stained red—he's bleeding from his neck. Michael props him up on the upstage end of the table. Charlie slumps over.

MICHAEL (*hands on the back of his neck*)

(*to himself*) Shit, man, what're you doing? What are you doing, Michael? You're covering it up like like like you're guilty—you're not... you're not a... just calm down, okay! Calm down, right fucking now. It's just a body, okay? You've seen how they get rid of these in movies. That's realistic, right? (*Beat*) No, you idiot! That's, they have, and it never works out in movies anyways, so they- ugh! Calm down again, okay? You got time. (*Beat*) No! No, he—he said Eric was gonna be home in an *hour*, so you got... less than an hour to... to. I mean, he can't find out about this, right? Somebody finds out about this then... then the police come, and an ambulance and everything, and Charlie's parents are pissed, and they press charges for manslaughter, at *least*, and then I go to jail for a little bit, and I don't go to grad school, and I never get a job, and so I'll have to learn how to cook meth except Eric's the only one who knows how to cook meth because he's a chem major but he's not my friend anymore because I murdered Charlie, and so I'll just be broke forever and one day I'll just die in the gutter and--

At this point Charlie sits up. He turns to face Michael.

CHARLIE

Dude! Michael! What are you *doing*?

MICHAEL (*mildly startled at hearing his friend speak*)

What?

CHARLIE

What are you doing?

MICHAEL

I dunno....

CHARLIE

Are you okay?

MICHAEL

I think, I... are you okay?

Charlie gives him a look: seriously?

MICHAEL

Yeah, I. Duh. I know. You're. (*Beat, Michael gestures*) Yeah. But, you're talking, aren't you?

CHARLIE

I guess. I mean, I highly doubt I'm actually talking to you. Probably just a construct of your brain.

MICHAEL (*awkward*)

Kay. Um. I'm. (*what does he talk about?*) You're gonna miss your set....

CHARLIE

Yeah, welp. Ya win some, ya lose some.

MICHAEL

(*light, confused chuckle*) Yeah.

CHARLIE

(*looking around*) Why'd you move me?

MICHAEL

The blood. It was gonna stain the rug.

CHARLIE

So what? Buy a new rug. They're like ten dollars.

MICHAEL

Well, yeah, but, like, people will see it.

CHARLIE

I mean, yeah, that's—hold up, are you.... Are you trying to cover this up? (*Pause. They stare at one another.*)

CHARLIE

Are you kidding me? Why? What would— why?

You've got to be shitting me. You're disposing of my body so you can go to grad school? I'm sorry my brutal death came at a bad time for you— Passive aggressive?

MICHAEL

Listen, Charlie, it's— it's nothing personal, it—Charlie, all my, all my plans, I can't go to grad school if I –

No, no, it's—hey, easy with that passive aggressive shit.

MICHAEL

Charlie, my entire life goes down the drain if I get blamed for this. I won't be able to go to grad school, and I can't cook meth because Eric hates me.

CHARLIE

What?

MICHAEL

And this is all happening to me because you couldn't let go of the knife! You couldn't just drop it and leave me alone to cook my salad.

CHARLIE

Salads don't count as cooking! Nothing gets cooked! You're just putting shit in a bowl!

MICHAEL

That's what you're getting from this? If you woulda just left me be and stopped when I told you to, everything would be fine right now. I could finish with my cooking, and you could go do your stand-up. But you couldn't, and so now we're here.

CHARLIE

Okay, like, it was a pretty cool knife.

MICHAEL

That's your defense? I'm not going to grad school unless I hide your body because it was a pretty cool knife?

CHARLIE

Well...

MICHAEL

Just... just be quiet for a second and let me think.

CHARLIE

You can't tell me what to do!

MICHAEL

You're a construct of my brain!

Charlie mocks him but stays quiet. For a moment, Michael looks down at Charlie. He goes around the bar counter and picks up the knife with a napkin. He turns around and flicks a switch on the wall. A garbage disposal gargles loudly, getting Charlie's attention. Michael turns and they stare at one another in silence for a moment. Tense silence. Charlie sees the knife. And Michael. And the garbage disposal. Then—

CHARLIE

No. No! No way!

MICHAEL

Look, can you just—no, I don't wanna...
Charlie, I

CHARLIE

I genuinely cannot believe I have to ask this, but Michael, please do not cut me up and put me in the garbage disposal.

MICHAEL

I'd take you out to the woods or the lake or something but Eric's gonna be home before I could get back. This is the only option before he gets home!

CHARLIE

Mmmm, I can think of a few options. Calling the police, for instance, or an ambulance. You know, alternatives to feeding your dead friend through a fucking garbage disposal!

MICHAEL

I'll, uh. I'll give you the leftovers from the salad.

CHARLIE

Yeah, try to bribe the corpse with food. And besides, I'd just clog the sink. And you'd have to get somebody to fix it, because I'm dead and you and Eric suck ass at fixing things, and then they'd start pulling filet of me outta there and you're busted. Even worse than if you just call 9-1-1, I'd say. 'Cause, like, how do you think my parents are gonna feel when they find out that after all this, you tried to cover it all up. How do you think my siblings are gonna feel?

MICHAEL

No, no. No! I know! I know.

CHARLIE

How do you think Eric will feel? Or Danielle, or Josh or Tania. All of them, how are they gonna feel knowing that you tried to hide this shit?

MICHAEL

I get it. I know.

CHARLIE

Do you? A minute ago it didn't seem like you didn't.

MICHAEL

I know! I know how they'll react. They're mostly why I'm doing this in the first place!

CHARLIE

Whada you mean?

MICHAEL

I... I—

CHARLIE

Why are you trying to cover this up, Michael? Because, why, because you're afraid everyone will stop liking you for this? You're afraid that Eric and them will stop being friends with you? You're—

MICHAEL

Yes! I'm afraid! I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry! I didn't mean to throw the cutting board that hard. I should've just found some other way to get the knife back. Okay? But I didn't. I threw it too hard, and I wasn't thinking, I was just frustrated, and— and now this is what

happens. This is what happens when I don't think things through! And so now all I'm trying to do is make the best out of the situation. I'm trying to find the least painful way to go about it. But I'm still not thinking straight because I don't have a plan for this and I'm sorry! I don't know where to go from here!

CHARLIE

(Pause) What exactly are you apologizing for?

MICHAEL

What? For...Charlie, you're dead because of me!

CHARLIE

Dude, you didn't kill me. You pushed me back and I fell on the knife.

MICHAEL

But still, I—

CHARLIE

It's not on you, man. This—this one's my bad.

MICHAEL

But I still hit you. If I hadn't done that, you'd...

CHARLIE

... probably have managed to stab myself some other way, dude! I was drunk! Look: it's my fault. And it's your fault. Let's just keep it at that. When the police show up, and they'll show you what I mean. Just explain what happened, truthfully and all that. Maybe leave out the part about putting me in the garbage disposal. And watch. They'll say, that part there, with the cutting board, that was Michael's fault. And that part, playing around with a knife and being an asshole, that was Charlie's fault, yeah? So let's leave it there. It's not your fault, man, not fully. And Eric and everybody, my family, yeah, they'll be sad. They. Of course they'll be sad. But they'll get over it, right? And I really don't think they won't forgive you, man, it was just a stupid mistake. This whole thing was just an accident.

Long pause. Michael sets the knife down on the counter and sits down next to Charlie.

MICHAEL

Sorry for making you miss your set.

CHARLIE

It's fine. Sorry for messing up your plans for the night. *(Beat)* Funny thing, I was gonna talk about how people apologize for stupid things.

MICHAEL

Oh?

CHARLIE

Yeah.

MICHAEL

I don't think I've ever actually been to one of your sets.

CHARLIE

Seriously? I told you to come all/ the time.

MICHAEL

/I know. I just figured I'd rather stay here and cook—or, make salad.

CHARLIE

Everybody else has gone.

MICHAEL

I know. They told me to go but it would've messed with my schedule.

CHARLIE

Yeah. I'm guessing not nearly as much as this does. *(Pause)* You want me to do one?

MICHAEL

Huh?

CHARLIE

I can do part of what I was gonna do tonight.

MICHAEL

Kay, sure.

CHARLIE

Alright, uh. *(getting into stage persona)* Well, like I said, people apologize for stupid things. All the time, all day long. I cannot tell you how many times I've bumped my leg against a table eating dinner and been like, "Oh, sorry!" As if the table's gonna be like "yeah, you better me. Fuckin' dumbass." *(Michael smiles)* There's no good reason for it, either. I mean, only once has the table actually got mad at me. *(Michael laughs)* It doesn't have to be just physical contact, either. It goes even further. Like, my friend, Michael, one night I was messing around with this knife, and I was getting close to stabbing him, so he hits me with a cutting board and I fall on the knife. And I'm dead on the floor, and he's apologizing to me like it's all his fault. Can you believe this guy? Smartest person I've ever met and he's apologizing to me— sorry for not wanted to get stabbed by you—

MICHAEL *(cutting him off)*

You weren't gonna perform that.

CHARLIE

Now I am. Because now it's funny. I tripped and stabbed myself. That's the lamest death I could've dreamed of. The only thing more ridiculous would be if... *(thinks)* no! That's the lamest one! *(Michael allows himself a weak smile)* That'll kill in the afterlife. *(Beat, his eyes light up)* That'll kill *again* in the afterlife. *(Michael laughs. Pause.)* Thanks for listening.

MICHAEL

Thanks for doing it. You would've done well tonight.

CHARLIE

Yeah, I know.

Pause.

MICHAEL *(standing)*

I'll see you, then.

CHARLIE

See ya.

Michael turns. He leans against the counter and begins to think aloud. Meanwhile, Charlie taps his fingers, waiting for something.

MICHAEL

Alright. I'll. I'll call... I'll call Charlie's parents first. They should hear it first. No. I'll. Do 9-1-1 first. Then his parents, and I'll. I'll clean this, no, I'll keep it as is, I... moving him was already a bad idea. *(grabs his phone)* Okay. Okay. I... what do I say, how do I... *(deep, shaky breaths)*

CHARLIE

Don't overthink it, dude.

Michael dials a number, three digits.

MICHAEL

Hello? I'm *(his voice catches, but he persists)* My name's Michael Riggett. There's, there's been an accident. My friend, Charlie, I... he fell, and...

Michael suddenly begins to cry but stays on the phone. Charlie stops tapping and gives a solemn smile before he slowly slumps back over. Michael remains on the phone. Fade to black.

END OF PLAY