

SAFE WALK

A ten-minute play
by Rebecca Kane

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Cast of Characters

MARGOT: 18-22 year old white woman

MICHAEL: 18-22 year old black man

SYNOPSIS:

It's a normal night at University of Central Florida. Too bad that a normal night on campus has necessitated a volunteer-run service called S.A.V.E. to provide young women with a companion to walk them home after dark. Margot requests a volunteer and gets Michael. They don't seem to have much in common at first -- and then, suddenly, sadly, too many of the same fears.

Place:

A library and the surrounding area on campus, University of Central Florida

Time:

Nighttime, modern day

CONTENT WARNING:

This play deals with racism and sexual assault.

[MARGOT waits in front of the library, making sure to stand in the center of the most well-lit spot she could find. Her hair is in a bun. She stands at attention, trying not to seem either nervous or on alert, but checking her phone twice within the span of a few seconds gives it away.]

MARGOT:

Whatever.

[She takes a deep breath and starts to walk away. Just as she does, MICHAEL appears. He has his phone out. He walks toward her.]

MICHAEL:

Hey.

[She wants to keep walking, but something in her makes the decision to stop.]

MARGOT:

Hey?

MICHAEL:

Are you Margot?

MARGOT:

OH! Yes! Sorry, my bad.

MICHAEL:

What?

MARGOT:

What?

MICHAEL:

What's your bad? Why are you sorry?

MARGOT:

I just... are you my S.A.V.E. walker? You are him, right? *[She quickly glances at her phone again.]* Michael? *[another glance]* "Michael is on the way"?

MICHAEL:

Oh, yeah, I forgot they send that. It's like Uber. But on feet. And morbid. And I'm not getting paid.

MARGOT:

Ha ha. Should we head out?

MICHAEL:

Wait, I have to read this out loud first. I forgot last time and the girl texted them and said I didn't introduce myself and they flipped out. But I guess they don't have enough people, because I'm still out and about tonight.

MARGOT:

How many walks are you doing tonight?

MICHAEL:

You're the first tonight. [*Reading from his phone.*] "Thank you for utilizing University of Central Florida's S.A.V.E. program—Students Against Violence in Education."

MARGOT:

In education?

MICHAEL:

What?

MARGOT:

I guess I didn't know what it stood for. "In education" doesn't make too much sense... wouldn't this sort of apply outside of the campus itself?

MICHAEL:

Sure, but all of those recent hair-pulling attacks were either on campus itself or on the grounds of campus housing.

MARGOT:

Oh. I didn't realize those Silver Lake houses were considered on-campus housing.

MICHAEL:

More like campus-sponsored housing? Campus-linked housing? Eh, who knows.

MARGOT:

Sorry, go on.

MICHAEL:

"Thank you for utilizing University of Central Florida's S.A.V.E. program—Students Against Violence in Education. The S.A.V.E. evening walking team is made entirely of volunteers who have been vetted and trained. Our main goal is to make sure our students feel safe getting from place to place at any hour they need. But if you make some friends along the way, all the better. Go Knights! If you experience a problem on your S.A.V.E.

accompanied evening walk, please call our twenty-four hour hotline at four-oh-seven—" *[looking up from his phone]* Well, you have the number, right? They should have sent you that when you first texted them.

MARGOT:

Yes. Saved to my phone. It's no comment on you.

MICHAEL:

No, it's a smart move.

MARGOT:

I guess I should feel better now that I know you've apparently been "vetted and trained"... whatever that means... but for some reason it doesn't.

MICHAEL:

Do you want to know what it means?

MARGOT:

Are you allowed to tell me?

MICHAEL:

It's not like it's the C.I.A.

MARGOT:

Ha ha.

MICHAEL:

Ha ha.

MARGOT:

Yeah, what sort of training is it?

MICHAEL:

Well, it's not like self-defense training or anything. Though I think that would be really useful. It's literally just a three-hour course where they do some powerpoint slides with a bunch of really scary statistics about assault in the streets and violence against women and whatnot.

MARGOT:

And whatnot?

MICHAEL:

Yeah.

MARGOT:

Can I know what the whatnot is?

MICHAEL:

All sorts of violence. Sexual violence. I don't want to get into it. They talked about some pretty gruesome stuff. It was that for the first hour or so, then they did some fake scenarios with multiple choice answers. Mostly just like, "Should you call the hotline in this scenario? Why or why not?"

MARGOT:

Who else would you call?

MICHAEL:

The police usually. One of the endless amounts of security guards they posted everywhere now that they finally decided it was worth the money.

MARGOT:

Oh.

MICHAEL:

Yeah, those were the less fun scenarios to run through. Then there was a question and answer session.

MARGOT:

What kinds of questions did people have?

MICHAEL:

Maybe you should take the training course.

MARGOT:

Sorry, I just think it was a weird way to word it. "Vetted and trained" like you ARE actually agents of some kind.

MICHAEL:

I was just kidding. About you taking the course. Not about the rest of it. [*She's trying to think of how to respond to that.*] "Vetted" means they did background checks and made sure we were all students in good standing. No disciplinary record, whatever.

MARGOT:

Why shouldn't I take the course?

MICHAEL:

It's a huge downer. As you can imagine.

MARGOT:

I don't have to imagine. I live it most days.

[This quickly leads to an awkward silence. Michael takes a moment to consider how to get of it, coming up with:]

MICHAEL:

We did get a boxed lunch.

MARGOT:

Oh. That helped, I bet.

MICHAEL:

It would have if it wasn't Subway. I prefer Jimmy John's.

MARGOT:

"Sorry about those rape statistics, but there is a cookie in there."

[Now they share a moment of genuine laughter, not "Ha ha"s.]

MICHAEL:

Wanna go home, Margot?

MARGOT:

You know it.

[They start walking. They should start out cautious, aware of their surroundings, and lose that along the way.]

MICHAEL:

You live in the Towers, right? Which building?

MARGOT:

Building four. Farthest one.

MICHAEL:

Gets pretty dark around there.

MARGOT:

That latest attack was in building two.

MICHAEL:

I think she got away before he was, you know...

MARGOT:

Successful?

MICHAEL:

I wish I could think of a better word. But yeah.

MARGOT:

Still. That's why I called.

MICHAEL:

I heard some girls are actually cutting their hair short just because of this whole thing.

MARGOT [*touching her hair*]:

No way.

MICHAEL:

Who knows if it even helps. You've clearly heard that's the best style to do anyway.

MARGOT:

Yeah but that—I mean, it makes sense.

MICHAEL:

No, come on, don't cut your hair.

MARGOT:

Why not? If it helps me not get raped in a stairwell by some guy who clearly has a hair fetish?

MICHAEL:

I get that, but you have to live your life a little. What's the point of being in college if you're going to spend the whole time in fear?

MARGOT:

I don't. Actually—don't tell anyone this—I thought this S.A.V.E. walk thing was kind of stupid at first. I assumed it was just a bunch of guys trying to show how "woke" and feminist they are by doing the bare minimum. Not that I think YOU'RE doing the bare minimum. But. You know what I mean?

MICHAEL:

Yeah, I actually kind of thought that too. I still think that about a lot of the guys in the training. Especially the ones who ditched halfway through.

MARGOT:

Guys just left?

MICHAEL:

Yeah, a bunch. Like a quarter of them at least. And they left before we even got to the scenarios.

MARGOT:

Why, because they thought it was too scary?

MICHAEL:

Guess so.

MARGOT:

They think that's scary...

MICHAEL:

Go on.

MARGOT:

No, it's fine. I already sort of said it earlier.

MICHAEL:

I know-- they wouldn't last one day in your shoes.

MARGOT:

Yeah! I... yeah. Exactly. I think that a lot. About guys who seem so macho and manly and tough. Like it's such hard work seeming so tough. You know what's hard? Being scared. Being scared and still going out in the night to study and do laundry and... you know what else pissed me off? About that speech they made you say before we started walking?

[She's rolling. He's kind of living for it.]

MICHAEL:

Besides everything about it?

MARGOT:

They're all like, "Our walkers will help you with whatever you need to do at night!" Well, what about the stuff I WANT to do? What about if I'm just going to - what - Sixteen Handles? Am I allowed to get fro-yo past sunset?

MICHAEL:

Do you want to go to Sixteen Handles?

MARGOT:

Kind of, yeah. Why, do you want to?

MICHAEL:

Oh yeah, for sure.

[They change direction.]

MARGOT:

And then we're still going to Towers, right?

MICHAEL:

No. You're gonna use that hotline tonight.

[He meant it as a joke, but she looks like she could not have found it less funny.]

MICHAEL:

Ha ha? *[Nothing from her.]* Sorry. I didn't mean that. Bad joke. Please don't tell them I said that.

MARGOT:

Why not? It's volunteer-based, so what's the worst that's gonna happen to you if they kick you off?

MICHAEL:

Nothing, I just. Kinda feel like I need this. I want to keep doing it. Please let me keep doing it.

MARGOT:

Why ARE you doing this? If the training session was so heavy, and there's "endless" security guys around now, and you prefer Jimmy John's, why are you doing it? To hit on girls and take them to Sixteen Handles?

MICHAEL:

Did it occur to you that you're not the only type of person who feels unsafe walking around at night?

MARGOT:

The hair-pulling guy only attacks women.

MICHAEL:

Maybe black guys have lots of reasons to not feel safe walking around at night. Maybe endless amounts of security guys make us feel worse, not better.

MARGOT:

What, and walking with some white girl makes it feel safer?

MICHAEL:

Yes.

[She doesn't have much to say to this. They've stopped walking.]

MARGOT:

Did you almost get kicked off the team when that girl reported you for not saying the speech?

MICHAEL:

Yes.

MARGOT:

Was she a white girl?

MICHAEL:

Yes.

MARGOT:

Sorry.

[There is the sound of footsteps, running. Getting closer. They're both frozen for a moment, then scramble for their phones, clutching them like weapons. Margot remembers she has pepper spray and stumbles for it, but then the footsteps are gone.]

MARGOT:

Can we just go to the Towers?

MICHAEL:

Yes.

[They start walking again, shaken.]

MARGOT:

You know what would make me feel safer?

MICHAEL:

What?

MARGOT:

If I didn't have to keep getting a stranger who had to give me a speech every time I did the S.A.V.E. walk. Also, if I knew you also had someone to walk with who wasn't trying to get you in trouble. That would make me feel safer.

MICHAEL:

I would also feel safer not doing that speech ever again.

MARGOT:

Ha ha.

MICHAEL:

Do you want my number, then? It's not like that. I promise it's not.

MARGOT:

No, it's not. But maybe next time we really can stop and get Sixteen Handles.

[They stop walking. They're at her door.]

MARGOT:

I'm just on the first floor, so you don't need to accompany me up or anything. But... do you have another walk assigned?

MICHAEL:

Not yet.

MARGOT:

I'll wait with you.

[They wait in silence. There is nothing romantic or sexual about it, but also nothing tense or awkward. Nothing unsafe. End of play.]