

# CLOUDS HILL

*Charles Evered*

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CLOUDS HILL

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles Evered is an author and journalist who has written; *The Size of the World and Other Plays*, (Billings/Morris, London, 1997), *The Shoreham and Other Plays*, (Whitman Press, 2002), *ADOPT A SAILOR*, (Emerson Review, 2003) and *WILDERNESS OF MIRRORS*, (Broadway Play Publishing Inc, 2004). Additional plays include; *BOSTON*, *TED'S HEAD* and *LOOKING AGAIN*.

*CLOUDS HILL* is the second play in his spy trilogy. The third play in the trilogy; *CELADINE*, premiered November of 2004 at The George Street Playhouse starring Amy Irving.

Mr Evered is a graduate of Rutgers, Yale University and The Naval Aviation Schools Command in Pensacola, Florida. He is a former officer in the United States Navy, (Res), having served with the Naval Office of Information during the onset of the War on Terror. Currently, he is an Assistant Professor at Emerson College in Boston. He is married to Wendy Rolfe Evered and the proud father of Margaret and John.

CLOUDS HILL was commissioned by The Manhattan Theater Club in New York City with a grant from the Alfred P Sloan Foundation. It was first presented at M T C as a workshop on 1 August 2003 with the following cast and creative contributor:

MICHAEL ..... Rick Holmes  
JANE ..... Enid Graham  
AHMAD ..... Charles Daniel Sandoval  
*Director* ..... David Auburn

It was subsequently presented as a special presentation at M T C on 1 December 2003 with the following cast and creative contributor

MICHAEL ..... David Harbour  
JANE ..... Mary Stuart Masterson  
AHMAD ..... Charles Daniel Sandoval  
*Director* ..... David Auburn

CLOUDS HILL was given its world premiere production at The City Lights Theater Company (Tom Gough, Artistic Director) in San Jose, California, opening September 18, 2004. The cast and creative contributors were:

MICHAEL ..... Kit Wilder  
JANE ..... Lisa Mallette  
AHMAD ..... Kunal Prasad  
*Director* ..... Charles Evered  
*Assistant director* ..... Ana-Catrina Buchser  
*Scenic design* ..... Kit Wilder  
*Costume design* ..... Joanne Martin  
*Lighting* ..... Brendan Bartholomew  
*Stage manager* ..... Kevin Morgan Major

## CHARACTERS & SETTING

MICHAEL, *late thirties/forties. A chemistry professor*

JANE, *a professor of political science. About the same age as*

MICHAEL

AHMAD, *a student, early twenties*

*The play takes place at Clouds Hill College, a small liberal arts college in the middle of the country.*

*The time is the present.*

To Wendy Rolfe Evered;  
Brilliant wife, brilliant mother, brilliant actress.  
Thank you for walking up to me.



## ACT ONE

*(In the dark, we hear solo cello music and birds chirping. Lights bump up, revealing a woman sitting on a bench. A man stands behind her, saying nothing at first, then)*

MICHAEL: I never talk to anyone I want to.

JANE: What?

MICHAEL: I walked across this entire green—thinking that up.

JANE: Did you? And what was it again?

MICHAEL: “I never talk to anyone I want to.”  
I’m not saying it’s “chisel worthy”....

JANE: You’re the new chemistry guy.

MICHAEL: That’s me.

JANE: Jane.

MICHAEL: Michael.

JANE: How do you like our little college so far?  
Is Clouds Hill everything you hoped it would be?

MICHAEL: What’s not to like? Green grass, pastoral settings. And cookies. Cookies everywhere.

JANE: They’re part of a plot.

MICHAEL: Really?

JANE: Yes, I have a theory about it. Would you like to hear it?

MICHAEL: I would—because I think I know where you're going.

JANE: I doubt it.

MICHAEL: You're right. That was presumptuous.

JANE: Here you are, after having negotiated—but only in a “representational” way, your salary. A salary that while you're not embarrassed of, still falls far short of both your expectations—but more importantly, your idea of “self.”

MICHAEL: Nail on the head.

JANE: And now orientation week—they tell you where the gym is, they tell you how to take out a library book, they tell you “please—don't have sex with the students,” and you're having buyer's remorse, aren't you? You're having second thoughts about having come here. You're having second thoughts about everything. About your choosing to become a professor, about moving to the middle of the country and just as all these thoughts are rising to the apex of your consciousness, you turn a corner—and there they are—

MICHAEL: Cookies.

JANE: Cookies. That's right. And they're not just any cookies, are they?

MICHAEL: No, they're not. They're plentiful and large. Almost what you'd call homemade.

JANE: And in some cases they are homemade. And warm.

MICHAEL: They were. Some of them were warm.

JANE: And what does that say to you?

MICHAEL: That they—recently baked them, or—

JANE: No, no, scientist—on a metaphorical level.

MICHAEL: Oh. Let's see—warm cookies.

JANE: Yes, what does that say?

MICHAEL: That “we—take care.” That “we—baked cookies and care about you.”

JANE: Right, like mommy. Like mommy did.

MICHAEL: My mommy never baked cookies.

JANE: I'm speaking emblematically here. I'm talking about what they're trying to do to you.

MICHAEL: They're trying to extinguish my fear.

JANE: But more than that, your doubts. How can anyone who provides me with ample warm cookies be exploiting me?

MICHAEL: Wow, that is evil.

JANE: Of course it is.

MICHAEL: But there's another way of looking at it, isn't there?

JANE: Oh?

MICHAEL: Yes, like for instance; Maybe they're just being nice and wanted to give us cookies.

JANE: New to academia, are you?

MICHAEL: Sort of.

JANE: Well, there is no “just” anything.

MICHAEL: You're right. They're trying to kill me.

JANE: Now you're getting it. Welcome to the academy, Michael.

MICHAEL: Thank you, Jane. Hey, I didn't see you at the introduction thing.

JANE: Oh, I can't do that anymore. I just don't go in much for forced collegiality.

MICHAEL: "Man is essentially a solitary being."

JANE: Be careful. You'd be wise to erase gender specificity from your vocabulary while you're here, or you'll get sick of being corrected time and time again.

MICHAEL: I'm sorry, you're right. "Man—and broads—are essentially solitary beings."

*(She laughs.)*

MICHAEL: Something tells me you're not a chemist. What with your having a personality and all.

JANE: Can you guess?

MICHAEL: Poli Sci.

JANE: Why can't I ever be a mystery?

MICHAEL: You're much more mysterious than I am.

JANE: Not so sure actually.

MICHAEL: Why do you say that?

JANE: I remember your resume. They sent it around.

MICHAEL: They "sent it around?"

JANE: Common practice. For all the new hires. Harvard, right?

MICHAEL: Guilty.

JANE: Very impressive.

MICHAEL: But not mysterious.

JANE: I remember thinking so. There was a gap.

MICHAEL: A "gap"?

JANE: That's right. I'm an expert at resume date manipulation. I used to do it myself. There's a way of implementing the dash—between dates, to make it look like you were never out of work.

MICHAEL: "Implementing the dash?"

JANE: Yes, there's the straight dash, which denotes "From this time to this time," and then there's another kind of dash—the kind of dash I remember your resume having. It wasn't a straight dash. It was more squiggly, and there was an ellipsis after one of them.

MICHAEL: "Eagle eye" Jane, is that how you're known around here?

JANE: So what about it?

MICHAEL: What about what?

JANE: The gap.

MICHAEL: I don't know if I'd call it a "gap."

JANE: What would you call it?

MICHAEL: A chronologic chasm.

JANE: So what were you trying to hide? Prison time?

MICHAEL: No.

JANE: A marriage on a lark. She was Russian. There was a mob connection.

MICHAEL: I did do a little time—in the military.

JANE: Hmm. That's it?

MICHAEL: I'm afraid so.

JANE: So why not put that down? You were in the military. What's there to be ashamed of?

MICHAEL: Who said I was ashamed?

JANE: You're right.

MICHAEL: Though your putting it that way proves my point.

JANE: Which is?

MICHAEL: I said military. You implied "shame."

JANE: Okay, you're a little right.

MICHAEL: If I had been applying to say—an insurance firm—do you think that association would have been made so quickly?

JANE: Oh, I see. Liberal arts college. Anti-military.

MICHAEL: Not consciously, no.

JANE: Just—

MICHAEL: Endemically. At its core.

JANE: We're sounding a little defensive, aren't we?

MICHAEL: No more than we're sounding a little patronizing.

JANE: What branch?

MICHAEL: Navy.

JANE: Cool. Did you drive a ship?

MICHAEL: Ships aren't "driven."

JANE: Sorry. So what did you do?

MICHAEL: I was just an "admin" guy. Office stuff. So what do people do around here for fun?

JANE: You mean other than avoiding lines of inquiry?

MICHAEL: Is there a kind of social life here?

JANE: "Kind" of one, yeah.

MICHAEL: Well, can I—can I buy you a cup of coffee sometime?

JANE: I suppose.

MICHAEL: When?

JANE: Sometime .

*(MICHAEL turns and we're in a classroom where we see a young man writing on an unseen black board.)*

MICHAEL: I don't think so.

AHMAD: (*Stops writing, turns to him*) With all due respect. Professor, you're wrong.

(*The young man goes back to writing on the board, almost manic*)

MICHAEL: Ahmad, you're forgetting about the relative Pka's —

AHMAD: We're in acidic conditions—that's irrelevant. (*He writes a little more.*) See?

(MICHAEL *stands, taken aback*)

MICHAEL: Oh. Well, I stoop corrected. Sorry about that. Actually, that's fine, Ahmad, let's just call it a day. (*Turns to unseen class*) Class dismissed. Keep working on the corollaries. See you on Thursday.

(AHMAD *picks up his book bag and starts out.*)

MICHAEL: Ahmad, could you stay a minute?

(AHMAD *turns.*)

MICHAEL: I uhm—I'm afraid we have a little bit of a situation here.

AHMAD: Yes.

MICHAEL: You're way ahead of me.

AHMAD: I am a little concerned.

MICHAEL: I imagine you must be.

AHMAD: Is there any way we could resolve this problem?

MICHAEL: Well, that's what I'm wondering. The only thing is,—and I don't mean this to sound as self serving as it does, but, I'm the best you're going to get in these parts.

AHMAD: I'm very anxious to learn.

MICHAEL: I could tell you are. It's just a little shocking, you know, compared to the rest of the kids here.

AHMAD: Yes, I know. I live in a house with six other students. All day and night there's television and fornication. M T V and magazines and talk about "Jerry Springer" and "primo weed."

MICHAEL: Well, I'm sorry to hear that. Are you able to get any work done?

AHMAD: Mostly I stay in the library. Sometimes I sleep in a study room.

MICHAEL: Well, as far as this class goes, perhaps we could arrange for you to study online.

AHMAD: That would be fine. Though, I would like to study with someone brilliant.

MICHAEL: You mean unlike me.

AHMAD: If possible.

MICHAEL: Gee, if I weren't so secure, I'd be insulted. Are you here for the year?

AHMAD: Why do you ask?

MICHAEL: I'm just curious.

AHMAD: I've checked in, if that's what you mean.

MICHAEL: "Checked in"?

AHMAD: Yes, with your Homeland Security. I'm all clean.

MICHAEL: I have no doubt you're "clean," Ahmad, I just asked so I could map out a course of study. How long will you be with us?

AHMAD: The year.

MICHAEL: Good.

(AHMAD *starts to leave.*)

MICHAEL: How do you like it so far? Clouds Hill, I mean.

AHMAD: I'm not here for fun.

MICHAEL: I know, I was just making conversation.

AHMAD: The women I notice—they're rather like whores.

MICHAEL: Whoa, Ahmad.

AHMAD: I mean their clothes, the way they talk.

MICHAEL: Well, you might want to tone down the rhetoric a little there. Strangely, some women get a little prickly when you call them "whores."

AHMAD: But the way they dress.

MICHAEL: Well, some of them, yeah.

AHMAD: So "some" of them are whores?

MICHAEL: No, that's— You can't really say—you know, how a person dresses doesn't really—

AHMAD: But it's how they act. I hear them. In the house I live in. I hear their heads beating against the wall in a rhythmic fashion.

MICHAEL: Well, those are particular girls.

AHMAD: So those particular girls are whores?

MICHAEL: Well no—

AHMAD: I can even hear it when the men ejaculate into them.

MICHAEL: Well, that's—that's very—

AHMAD: And none of them are married.

MICHAEL: Well, that may be true.

AHMAD: So, what would *you* call them?

MICHAEL: Well, I would say they're young women engaged in a consensual activity.

AHMAD: Where I come from they would be called whores. (He starts to leave.)

MICHAEL: You know, Ahmad, don't forget to hang out a little bit. Make a little time for fun.

AHMAD: That's not what I'm here for.

MICHAEL: I see. Well, I'll work on the course. Until then, try to put up with my inadequacies, okay?

AHMAD: (*No hint of irony*) I'll try.

(MICHAEL turns, he's standing in front of JANE on the bench outside.)

JANE: Why wouldn't he call them that?

MICHAEL: But if *I* called them whores.

JANE: You'd be an asshole.

MICHAEL: Because of where I was born.

JANE: Right, but that's true with everything. If you were African American and called someone an "N" word—

MICHAEL: I'd be down with my homies.

JANE: Right, but being that you were born in— I'm guessing New Jersey?

MICHAEL: Guess again.

JANE: You'd be considered a racist.

MICHAEL: And you don't find any of this ridiculous?

JANE: You're not going "A-W-G" on me are you?

MICHAEL: "A-W-G?"

JANE: Angry White Guy?

MICHAEL: No, I'm not going "A-W-G" on you.

JANE: You were moving in that direction.

MICHAEL: Maybe I was being moved in that direction.

JANE: Here it comes.

MICHAEL: What?

JANE: You're going to start implying that things are no longer the way they used to be. The shores of your identity are being licked by the waves of inevitability.

MICHAEL: It just occurred to me how I might get an "A" in your class.

JANE: How is that?

MICHAEL: Agree with you.

JANE: Not true.

MICHAEL: Stand here and tell me you don't indoctrinate those porous little minds.

JANE: I don't indoctrinate. I present.

MICHAEL: Really.

JANE: I present a world view.

MICHAEL: Whose world view?

JANE: The world view I've come to understand.

MICHAEL: "Americans are bad, the rest of the world is good. We're imperialists, colonialists, genocidal psychopaths and the cause of the world's problems."

JANE: That's not what I teach. What you need to do is take a quick peak at the immigration flow chart and the census once every four years to see that you're a dinosaur. And worse than that, your ideas are antiquated. I know your type. You walk around with a haughty superiority born out of the new victim status you've conferred upon yourself.

(AHMAD *appears off to the side, holding a soccer ball as JANE continues.*)

JANE: Which of course is more than a little ironic, being that for so many years—the world was a victim of you. And now we have to sit around and listen to this neo-con whine day after—

(MICHAEL *sees AHMAD.*)

MICHAEL: Ahmad.

AHMAD: I hope I'm not interrupting.

MICHAEL: Uh, no...not at all.

AHMAD: (*Holding up the ball*) I was trying to "socialize." Like you suggested.

MICHAEL: Well, how did it go?

AHMAD: No one here plays football.

MICHAEL: Oh, do you know —

AHMAD: Yes, I tried to get into your Modern Political Theory course, but it was closed.

JANE: Oh, too bad.

(AHMAD *just stands there.*)

MICHAEL: So, uhm—would you like to join us?

AHMAD: Yes.

(AHMAD *sits on the ground. MICHAEL and JANE awkwardly do the same. More awkward silence*)

MICHAEL: So, Jane and I were just talking about—

AHMAD: —how the world is a "victim of you"?

MICHAEL: So it seems.

JANE: I don't know if it's worth dragging him into it. (To AHMAD) We shouldn't bore you with this stuff. I imagine Americans must always try to engage you in

conversations about things you don't want to talk about—just because you're not from here.

AHMAD: I'm happy to talk about anything.

MICHAEL: How is your living situation working out? Is it getting any better?

AHMAD: A little, yes.

MICHAEL: Good.

JANE: What happened?

MICHAEL: Oh, Ahmad was just having some trouble with a couple room mates.

JANE: You're not rooming with some local rednecks are you?

AHMAD: "Red-necks?"

JANE: There's a tremendous fear of the "other" here.

AHMAD: I don't understand—"other"?

MICHAEL: It's a kind of —academic moniker.

AHMAD: Moniker?

JANE: Not exactly.

AHMAD: But isn't everyone "other" than someone else?

MICHAEL: You would think, yes, but apparently some people are more "other" than other people are.

AHMAD: What a strange idea.

MICHAEL: I think so.

AHMAD: I should apologize to you. Do you mind if I call you "Michael"?

MICHAEL: Of course not. Why apologize?

AHMAD: I was rude to you. I said things that—looking back, were blunt and not thought out.

MICHAEL: That's quite alright, Ahmad. There's no need. Have you gotten in touch with my professor friend in Chicago?

AHMAD: Yes. We've started emailing each other, and the assignments are highly challenging. I'm very appreciative.

MICHAEL: No problem. The least we could do is teach you things you don't already know. *(To JANE)* Ahmad is way past go on anything I could teach him.

JANE: I'm not surprised. *(To AHMAD)* You come from the cradle of civilization after all—where higher learning was practically invented.

AHMAD: Do I?

JANE: Of course you wouldn't know that from reading the main stream press here. Nothing but a bunch of terrorists.

AHMAD: Do you not like your country?

JANE: What? Well, yes. In a way. Although lately I have some pretty big problems with it.

AHMAD: I see. Have you been to my part of the world?

JANE: No, but I plan to.

AHMAD: It would be good for you to see the difference.

JANE: No doubt.

AHMAD: I think America is a wonderful country.

JANE: Really?

MICHAEL: Well, stick around academia for awhile, Ahmad, we'll drum that out of you.

AHMAD: No, I appreciate it here. The chance to study. The freedoms.

JANE: You mean "Freedoms" in quotes.

AHMAD: What “quotes”?

MICHAEL: Hey, how 'bout those Red Sox lately, huh?

AHMAD: You have the freedom to have contempt for your country. Isn't that what you all had recently? All the demonstrations, all the bad mouthing of your president?

JANE: Well, he picked a pretty big fight.

AHMAD: But isn't that your opinion?

JANE: My opinion based in fact.

AHMAD: You seem disappointed.

JANE: About what?

AHMAD: That I don't agree with you.

MICHAEL: You know, you do seem disappointed.

JANE: Don't be ridiculous. He could believe whatever he wants.

MICHAEL: Hey, what do you know. It *is* a free country.

AHMAD: Do you know about the Moriori?

JANE: From the Chathams?

AHMAD: Yes.

MICHAEL: Who are they?

AHMAD: They were a people—very much like your own, I think.

JANE: They were a tribe from the Pacific Rim—they were one of the first known, relatively modern people to formally renounce war, even going so far as to castrate many of their male infants in order to diminish their innate war like propensity.

MICHAEL: Ouch.

AHMAD: They were subsequently slaughtered by the Maori. They had no leaders, no strong state organization. Almost every one of them was killed

MICHAEL: And how are we like them exactly?

AHMAD: Well, perhaps a case could be made that your country is doing the same thing. Castrating yourselves.

JANE: Or, a case could be made that we're becoming a War State—pre-emptively engaging anyone who even vaguely threatens us.

AHMAD: But how do you explain your men? The softening of your men?

MICHAEL: Yeah, what about us? Even our country singers are pansies now. Have you heard country music lately? It's all about feelings and love and crap.

AHMAD: Your men are ridiculous here. They're just woman with pants on.

MICHAEL: Some of them are women with dresses on.

(AHMAD *laughs*.)

JANE: Well, isn't this cozy?

MICHAEL: Well, come on Jane, the kid has a point.

AHMAD: Where I come from, men perform a certain function—and women perform a certain function.

JANE: And there's an aspect of that I agree with.

MICHAEL: Why do Muslims get a pass?

JANE: What?

MICHAEL: It seems to me that if Catholics treated women the way Muslims did, women's groups would be even more down on the Catholic Church than they already are. But yet for some reason, Muslims get a pass. Why is that?

AHMAD: I don't understand.

MICHAEL: Come on, you get a pass.

JANE: What's your problem with Muslims?

MICHAEL: I don't have a problem.

AHMAD: Well, you sound like you do.

MICHAEL: I just have a theory about it.

JANE: Is it offensive?

MICHAEL: I'm sure to someone it is.

JANE: I'd be careful if I were you.

MICHAEL: There, see! That's just it. "Careful."  
That's why people give Muslims a pass.

AHMAD: Why?

MICHAEL: Because people are scared.

JANE: Of what?

MICHAEL: Of Muslims. Not Muslims in general,  
no offense to you of course, Ahmad, but the more  
fanatical variety. People are terrified.

AHMAD: Why are they terrified?

MICHAEL: Because very few other groups, religions or  
organizations routinely order death threats on people  
that disagree with them. Piss off some gay people, it's  
bad, but they usually won't put a price on your head.  
Don't serve a black person at a Denny's—boycotts and  
picket lines and rightly so, but you don't hear them  
threatening to kill the children of the Denny's manager.  
There is a difference.

JANE: "Simplistic" is too flattering a word.

AHMAD: He's not exactly wrong.

JANE: What?

AHMAD: He has a point.

MICHAEL: It's just an observation.

JANE: How could you listen to this?

AHMAD: I should go.

*(AHMAD gets up, holding the soccer ball again)*

AHMAD: Next time lets play football.

JANE: Why, when "pile on the Muslims" is so much more fun?

*(AHMAD smiles.)*

AHMAD: Have a good day.

*(AHMAD leaves. JANE turns to MICHAEL.)*

JANE: Stick to chemistry. Geo-politics isn't your strong suit.

MICHAEL: I happen to think it's better to hang a lantern on things.

JANE: Even your own prejudices?

MICHAEL: Especially my own prejudices. Would you rather I keep mine sublimated like some people?

JANE: Meaning me?

MICHAEL: I always equate modern day liberals with Victorians. They're both so scared of the power of language, of saying and doing the wrong thing. Don't you ever think of anything inappropriate, Jane?

JANE: Of course I do.

MICHAEL: I'm thinking something highly inappropriate right now. Would you like to know what it is?

JANE: I'm going to leave now. *(She starts to leave.)*

MICHAEL: Hey, was this our coffee?

JANE: Yes, consider this was our coffee.

ACT ONE

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MICHAEL: So, what about moving on to dinner?

JANE: I'm not interested, thank you. I'm not attracted to you. Was that "inappropriate" enough for you?

*(She turns and leaves. MICHAEL stands frozen as the lights come up on AHMAD, writing on the chalk board again.*

*MICHAEL steps forward.)*