

Reparation

A Play in Three Acts

by

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Theatre Professionals:

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Reparation -- Character List, Technical Requirements

List of Characters:

ETZ -- early forties -- crisis line counselor

Cafe Characters:

THE BAG LADY -- ancient -- a homeless woman

DARLA -- mid-teens -- BARRY's daughter

VONNIE JEAN -- mid-forties -- a waitress

RICHARD -- late twenties -- a builder

BARRY -- late thirties -- a customer

Crisis Line Characters:

THE SEER -- ancient -- a prophet

THE CHILD -- mid-teens -- mentally-challenged

THE MOTHER -- mid-forties -- daughterly-challenged

THE FARMER -- late twenties -- occupationally-challenged

THE SPOKESMAN -- late thirties -- socially-challenged

Bar Fixtures:

MAXINE -- mid-forties -- barmaid

JAKE -- late thirties -- manager

Vietnam Characters:

SERGEANT -- late twenties -- a poet

COLONEL -- late thirties -- a capitalist

VIETNAMESE GIRL -- mid-teens -- a performer

HER MOTHER -- mid-forties -- a capitalist

Homebodies:

SISTER -- late teens -- sometimes sleeps late

MOTHER -- mid-forties -- pinches herself often

BROTHER -- late twenties -- never sleeps

STEP-FATHER -- late thirties -- an outsider

Time, Place:

The present. Any town large enough to have a crisis line.

Technical Requirements:

Set: 1 interior, with minor changes between acts

Costumes: Modern, everyday dress, costume pieces for quick transformations

Special Effects: Fireplace

Reparation -- Playwright's Notes

As the title suggests, "Reparation" is a play about seeking forgiveness, about attempting to make amends for past mistakes.

In the three acts of this play, we follow the main character, Etz, as he skids off his circuit course of a respectable life, re-lives a moment of truth where he is faced with the challenge of doing "the decent thing," and finally seeks reparation for sins the nature of which he does not fully understand. People of his past and present come and go quickly and seamlessly, so that he is not fully aware of the frame of reality in which he is standing at any given time.

Throughout, the play asks the question: Does living in a twisted and mangled world change what all of us who are called to do the "decent thing" are expected to do? All the characters are grappling with this issue, each to the extent of his or her capability. The Cafe Characters (Vonnie Jean, Barry, Darla, and Richard) are teased by near-normalcy and asked to risk that approximation in their struggle with decency. The Crisis Line Characters (The Seer, The Child, The Mother, The Farmer, and The Spokesman) each are straining for a sense of decency in their own little "hell" -- raising the question: "What sense of decency is expected of one who is struggling in a private hell? The Bar Fixtures (Maxine, Jake) feign decency in an attempt to make what they are doing appear acceptable. The Vietnam Characters (Sergeant, Colonel, Vietnamese Girl, Her Mother) all strive for decency within their very different frameworks, showing how differently "decency" can be interpreted among different cultures and between different classes of citizenry. The Homebodies (Sister, Brother, Mother, Step-Father) deal within a domestic struggle with decency within the home, which is perhaps the most crucial struggle of all.

There are some twenty-one characters presented in this play; it is not my desire for a production company to have twenty-one actors engaged in it. I have designed it for six actors, with all actors (besides the one playing the role of ETZ) playing multiple roles:

1 actor:	Etz
1 actor:	Vonnie Jean, The Mother, Maxine, Vietnamese Mother, Mother
1 actor:	The Bag Lady, The Seer
1 actor:	Barry, The Spokesman, Jake, Colonel, Step-Father
1 actor:	Darla, The Child, Vietnamese Girl, Sister
1 actor:	Richard, The Farmer, Sergeant, Brother

Of course, these are not set in stone. I would be fascinated to discover a different arrangement that can still be "pulled off" within the parameters of the script.

The actors playing the multiple roles will undoubtedly see many connections between the various characters they play, an intentional thread or theme running through the lives of their characters. One of the great challenges for the actors and director will be to make each character a whole individual, allowing his or her differences to challenge the obvious similarities within the whole set of characters they are playing.

Many of the transformations between characters are done quickly, while on stage, which presents another challenge not only for the costume and makeup designer(s), but for the actors as well. I trust this challenge will prove a good learning opportunity for the less experienced actors and designers, and an opportunity for more experienced actors and designers to showcase their talent.

I hope these notes help. They are not intended to box you into a certain specific interpretation of the play, but to give you an idea of what I was thinking as I went about creating it. Have fun with it. Explore! If you can show me something about the characters in this play that I would never have known otherwise, that's even better yet. You've done me, yourselves, and the play a great service.

-- Brian Kokensparger

ACT I

SETTING:

A greasy spoon. Late afternoon. There is a simple counter with stools, and tables off to the side. The Formica covering the counter is yellowed by old grease and numerous coffee stains.

AT RISE:

ETZ, in his early forties, is sitting on his usual stool, drinking coffee. VONNIE JEAN, 40ish, stands behind the counter, wiping it down.

VONNIE JEAN

You didn't hear about Betty, did ya? You know, she works over at scary Theo's? They call her the cockroach queen.

(ETZ grunts)

Well, she's been hot with one of the busboys. Guess they had a thing goin'. You know -- greasin' his salami in the pantry? Well, she loses her wedding ring and goes out in the alley to check the garbage an' she catches her beau rubbin' the other busboy's radish. Right there by the dumpster. They were having their polish sausage special that day, an' she was so pissed she dumped that whole pan a' polish sausage in the alley an' jumped up smashed every one of 'em with her heel. Lost two hundred dollars worth a' meat. The boys got fired. Never did find her weddin' ring. Told her ole man she lost it down the sink.

(ETZ grunts again, pushes his cup toward her)

What the hell's wrong with you? Do I need to drop a couple valiums in your coffee?

(ETZ shrugs)

You ain't said boo since ya got in here.

(Wiping the counter)

Didn't get fired, did ya?

(ETZ shakes his head)

I say I can't hear you.

ETZ

No I didn't get fired.

VONNIE JEAN

You talk in that tone a' voice again an' I'm gonna hafta put my heel to your polish sausage.

(ETZ grunts)

You ain't banged your cup on the counter once.

(She stares at him. ETZ bangs his cup against the counter)

There's my Etz.

(She pours him more coffee)

So ya gonna talk about it or ya gonna sit there an' let it simmer?

(She pauses, waiting. ETZ is silent)

Suit yourself. Just see what kinda pancakes you get tomorrow.

(She picks up her cloth and wipes a different part of the counter. ETZ is still silent. They spend a good while in silence. She looks up at him while she's wiping, then when he looks up at her she looks away, and

vice versa. Finally, she picks up an empty plate, holding it out to him. He looks up at her, strangely)

VONNIE JEAN (continued)

Well? Go on.

(He is still puzzled)

Do I hafta do it myself?

(Puts it in his hand)

Take your best shot. Jimmie'll kill me, but what the hell.

(He stares at her, holding the plate)

Well if you're gonna be such a wimp about it.

(She picks up an empty coffee cup)

Here's one for the cockroach queen . . .

(Throws the cup against the wall, breaking it. She looks at ETZ)

Well? Go on!

(ETZ smiles a little to himself, stands up off of the stool, balancing the plate in his hand. He pulls back to throw)

Geronimo!

(He throws it against the wall, breaking it. Ab-libbed cheering from VONNIE JEAN)

ETZ

(Holding out his hand)

One more.

VONNIE JEAN

The first one's on the house. Gotta put the second one on your tab.

ETZ

I'm good for it.

(She hands him another plate. He breaks the second one against the wall. More ab-libbed cheering. ETZ walks over and starts picking up the pieces)

VONNIE JEAN

Leave 'em, honey. I'll get 'em later. Sit down. Tell me why you're here at two-thirty in the afternoon. An' don't say you took off sick.

(He drops one of the bigger pieces on the counter in front of her)

Didn't lose your job, did ya?

(ETZ shakes his head)

People at work givin' ya trouble?

(Shaking his head again. VONNIE JEAN leans forward, a bit awkwardly)

Did ya lose one? Is that it?

ETZ

A couple.

(VONNIE JEAN is silent. She tries to think of something to say)

There isn't anything to say. Don't bother.

VONNIE JEAN

Well. Ain't your fault . . . is it?

(ETZ shakes his head)

Well?

ETZ
They're people. Flesh and blood. I'm supposed to help them.

VONNIE JEAN
You do--

ETZ
(Exploding)
Bull shit!

VONNIE JEAN
You listen. They pick up their phone and dial a number, and you're there to listen. You help by listenin'. That's what a crisis line is for. That's your job --
(ETZ snorts, shaking his head. He knocks his coffee cup against the counter. VONNIE JEAN automatically warms it)
Well, you're in the wrong business if you don't wanna hurt. Ya oughta try football -- it's a little easier on a person.
(Picks up a broom to sweep up the glass)
Who's mannin' the line?

ETZ
Vinnie. He lives there as it is. He can handle it.
(Smiles dimly)
He can have it. Maybe I'll stay here an' work the counter with you.

VONNIE JEAN
Sonny, you step one foot on my turf an' I'll devil your eggs.

ETZ
Talked to one fellow today. Worked at Grain-Fed. Used to.

VONNIE JEAN
You mean Brain-Dead's layin' off again?

ETZ
Two hundred an sixty.

VONNIE JEAN
(Staggers a little)
Two hundred an sixty?

ETZ
I don't stutter.

VONNIE JEAN
(Shaking her head)
You know what they're doin'? Movin' to Mexico. Little by little. Won't be long till they close the whole plant down.

ETZ
All those people standing in line at the unemployment office.

VONNIE JEAN

And then standin' in line for a bullet when that runs out.

ETZ

(Looking at her)

You'll feed 'em. If they come in asking for a meal. Won't you?

VONNIE JEAN

Yeah. If they got the money.

ETZ

That's not what I meant.

VONNIE JEAN

Why does it have to be my problem?

ETZ

'Cause we gotta take care of 'em, that's why.

VONNIE JEAN

We ain't gotta do nothin' but die an' pay taxes. An' ya don't even hafta do that if ya don't make no money.

ETZ

(Taking a sip of coffee, fingering the shard)

I don't know.

VONNIE JEAN

Now don't get yourself all depressed again. I'll set up the checkerboard.

ETZ

Won't Jimmie --

VONNIE JEAN

Ain't here. Climbs upstairs for a nap 'bout this time every day. Tells me if somebody orders some food I gotta fend for myself. Nobody ever does.

ETZ

I'd like a pheasant under glass, rice pilaf, a Ceasar's salad, and baked Alaska. To go.

VONNIE JEAN

Comin' right up!

(Exits into the kitchen, ETZ is surprised. VONNIE JEAN pokes her head back in)

How would you like your baked Alaska?

ETZ

Medium rare.

(VONNIE JEAN nods and disappears again. The door opens and THE BAG LADY enters, carrying a piñata)

ETZ

Emma! How are you doing?

VONNIE JEAN

(Re-entering, sees her)
I told you not to come back. Just get outa here.

ETZ

(Holding up his hand)
Watcha got there?

VONNIE JEAN

She's gotta go.
Go!
(To THE BAG LADY)

ETZ

Wait a minute. She always-

VONNIE JEAN

Not no more she doesn't. Yesterday? She peed right there on the floor. Big puddle right under that table.

(THE BAG LADY stands motionless)

ETZ

Whatcha got there?
A piñata. Where'd ya get that?
(THE BAG LADY clutches her piñata more tightly)

VONNIE JEAN

I don't care. She's going. I told 'er to never come back.

ETZ

She can have a little toast an' coffee.

VONNIE JEAN

No!
(Puts her hand to her waist)
She ain't allowed in here no more. If I hafta call the police, I will!

ETZ

(Getting off of his stool and crossing to her. He sits her down in the chair, then bends over and talks to her like a child)

Emma? Now if you have to go to the bathroom, you tell Vonnie Jean, okay?

(THE BAG LADY stares at him, speechless)

You tell her, okay?

(THE BAG LADY still stares. ETZ turns back to VONNIE JEAN)

She'll tell you if she has to go.

VONNIE JEAN

Sure she will! Sure! Damn losers come in here and pee all over hell and back. That's real good for business, real good. You don't see it after you leave. You don't see the bums that stagger in here. Belching and farting and swillin' all our coffee. You don't see that. You just see little old Emma bein' real meek an' quiet an' lookin' like your granma you never liked to visit. You buy 'er toast an' coffee gets her. She don't talk nasty to you, but ya oug

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