

The Volunteer State

A full-length play by Selah DeGering

Contact:
Selah DeGering
748 Wymount Terrace
Provo, UT 84604
(801) 462-1814
selahdegering@gmail.com

The Volunteer State
by Selah DeGering
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A full-length play

7 men and 4 women, ensemble.

SAMPLE

Shelby County, Morrisville, TN. May, 1949. When Paul Reverend, estranged since the war, unexpectedly returns to the family diner, A Manna of Taste, with a married woman on his arm, hatchets long buried are exhumed and send the business into crisis.

Cast of Characters

| | |
|------------------|--|
| Ricky Reverend | Early twenties, male. Fifth and youngest Reverend brother. Served one year in the war. Avoids conflict. |
| June Danzy | Early twenties, female. Waitress at the diner, works to support her family. |
| Paul Reverend | Mid-twenties, male. Fourth Reverend brother. Studying medicine in Connecticut. Did not serve. |
| Laurel | Mid-twenties, female. From Connecticut. Married early, estranged. |
| Matthew Reverend | Mid-forties, male. Eldest Reverend brother. A father, patriarch of the family. Diner owner. Did not serve. |
| Rachel Reverend | Thirties, female. Widow to second Reverend brother, Mark. Chef in the diner. |
| John Reverend | Late twenties, male. Third Reverend brother. Was not eligible for service in the war. Lawyer. |
| Mr. Alexander | Fifties plus, male. Mayor, corrupt official, Georgianna's father; wealthy. |
| Georgianna | Early twenties, female. Mayor's daughter; highly entitled. |
| Boyfriend | Early twenties, male. Son of the Chief of Police. |
| Cronie 1 and 2 | Twenties, support Georgianna. |
| Lawyer | Forties plus, male; paid very well. |
| Ensemble | Varied. Include Cronies, Lawyer, Georgianna, Mr. Alexander, and Patrons. |

Act I, Scene I

Morning. JOHN enters with a set of suitcases. PAUL enters with a second batch, but leaving his by the door, takes the luggage JOHN has.

I got it.

PAUL

Ricky's asleep.

JOHN

PAUL brings the suitcases to the loft, having some trouble with the stairs, and leaves them in the den.

Watch your step.

JOHN

PAUL joins JOHN downstairs in the diner.

On the stairs.

JOHN

Should be everything.

PAUL

Good. Laurel still out?

JOHN

Like a light. Engine's running, though.

PAUL

Ricky's out of a room how long, about?

JOHN

I doubt he'll mind./

PAUL

JOHN
/He'd wanna know soon as possible.

PAUL
I'll talk to Matthew and get it all sorted.

JOHN
What?

PAUL
Don't worry about it.

JOHN
He doesn't know?

PAUL
Calm down.

JOHN
You brought this girl all the way down here for God knows how long--

PAUL
I'll get Matthew's permission.

JOHN
It's a little late for that!

PAUL
Shh! Listen, I didn't think it'd be that big of a problem.

JOHN
You didn't think.

PAUL
If you had some kind of problem with us coming down here/

JOHN
Paulie didn't think, surprise, surprise.

PAUL

/Then you shouldn't have... Now, wait a second.

JOHN

We're glad t'help when you need it, but/

PAUL

/But when someone else does, it's too hard?

JOHN

You didn't say anything about a girl.

PAUL

Again, with the "girl".

JOHN

How are you gonna explain this to Matt? You know what this looks like?

PAUL

Feeding the hungry. Housing the homeless.

JOHN

You can't expect us to rearrange our whole lives/

PAUL

It was my understanding--

JOHN

/So yours can be perfect.

PAUL

Sorry charity's so inconvenient for you.

Enter LAUREL.

JOHN

Shut down the truck?

LAUREL gives the keys to JOHN.

LAUREL
Have the time?

JOHN
We open soon.

PAUL
Matthew cut hours?

JOHN
New burger place down the street. Shops're poppin' up all over, makes business tough.

LAUREL
--Where're you going?

JOHN
Wife's waitin' up. You're welcome to stay with us if this... If y'want.

LAUREL
It's kind of you to offer.

JOHN
(to PAUL) Somethin' funny?

PAUL
Not really.

JOHN
(to LAUREL) I dunno when Ricky gets up, should be soon, but it's his room first--

PAUL
--Johnny's playing hero.

LAUREL
(to PAUL) Don't pick a fight.

JOHN
Pardon?

PAUL

Nothing.

JOHN

(to LAUREL) ...I'm a phone call away if you need anything.

JOHN begins to leave.

PAUL

Ooh, generous.

JOHN stops.

PAUL

John's real selfless, isn't he?/

JOHN

/I'm doing you a favor--

PAUL

And I owe you.

JOHN

I didn't say that.

PAUL

I suppose she does, then.

JOHN

No--

PAUL

Kindness comes with a price, though, I mean- a fella can't come home for free, can't expect help for nothin'--

JOHN

Look, you're out gettin' your medical degree and that's great. You're out there makin' somethin' of yourself. It's good t'be proud of that. What that doesn't mean is that you can peacock around actin' a fool like you're better'n everybody!

PAUL

Why shouldn't I? You got to, back when- oh, wait, you didn't get the chance!

JOHN

Shut your mouth before you say somethin' foolish.

PAUL

You were rarin' to go kill yourself some Nazis! Did I tell you that, Laurel, that Johnny was gonna be some great big hero back in the day? Yeah, he was gonna save the good ol' USA and then the world! Make Mom and Pop real proud of him, yessir, and we'd all send him letters, and when it was over, he'd get thanked for his service, and... What's the matter? Don't wanna reminisce?

JOHN

I thought we'd grown out of all this by now.

PAUL

I shouldn't salute you? I shouldn't fall on my knees, "Thank you!", John?

JOHN

Get up.

PAUL

Really done your country proud, haven't you? You deserve a medal.

JOHN

I've half a mind to kick your sorry butt back to Savannah.

PAUL

Don't want one? You don't want a medal?

JOHN

...I don't.

PAUL

Of course you don't. You're too humble.

JOHN

You up and left to play doctor/

Ooh, fighting words.

PAUL

/While Mark-

JOHN

Mark? Mark, Johnny? You gonna finish that or just stand there? While Mark what?

PAUL

(to LAUREL) ...Let me know if you need anything.

JOHN

While Mark fought the good fight in Germany?

PAUL

(to JOHN) Thanks for your help.

LAUREL

While Mark got blown to bits for nothin'?

PAUL

(To LAUREL) Be careful.

JOHN

Nothin' to bury! Nothin' t' give Rachel but the stars'n stripes and a dog tag!

PAUL

JOHN exits as MATTHEW and RACHEL enter. RACHEL goes to the kitchen.

--'Scuse me.

JOHN

Sure, g'mornin'-- (to PAUL) Where have you been? Paul!

MATTHEW

MATTHEW greets PAUL with enthusiasm.

Matthew!

PAUL

MATTHEW

Look at you! What on Earth've you been up to?

PAUL

School.

MATTHEW

No kiddin'- is somethin' th'matter? Are you in trouble?

PAUL

I've got a friend-

MATTHEW

I see that. So how long've you two--

PAUL

We're not-

LAUREL

I'm married.

MATTHEW

Oh. Okay.

RACHEL

Hm.

PAUL

This is Laurel.

LAUREL

Hi.

MATTHEW hugs LAUREL briefly.

MATTHEW

Nice t'meet you.

RACHEL

Charmed.

This is Matthew, and my sister-

PAUL

RACHEL exits the kitchen.

In law.

RACHEL

PAUL

(to RACHEL) Laurel's going to be staying with you guys awhile.

RACHEL

Huh. Name's Rachel. --We're on a bit of a schedule over here, so if y'don't mind.

RACHEL readies the diner for opening.

PAUL

Oh! Right, yeah. (to MATTHEW) Do you have a minute?

MATTHEW

Sure! Um-

RACHEL

Send the girl.

PAUL

(to LAUREL) She's nice when you get to know her.

LAUREL joins RACHEL.

MATTHEW

Good news, I hope?

PAUL

School's great, y'know, it's the end of the semester--

MATTHEW

What d'you want, Paul?

... She needs a place to stay.

PAUL

“Awhile.”

MATTHEW

The most I’ve got can put her in a motel a few days, but/

PAUL

How bad?

MATTHEW

/If you give me some time, I can work out something more--

PAUL

How bad?

MATTHEW

There’s nowhere else.

PAUL

Okay.

MATTHEW

Okay?

PAUL

... If you can persuade Ricky t'give it up, she can have the upstairs.

MATTHEW

PAUL takes out his wallet.

I'll cover it as long as she needs.

PAUL

That's not necessary.

MATTHEW

PAUL offers money. MATTHEW takes it,
then the wallet, and puts it back inside.

Don't be a stranger.

MATTHEW

MATTHEW returns the wallet.

John's helpin' with produce today.

MATTHEW

I won't start anything.

PAUL

/Talk t'him and sort your business. You owe'im that.

MATTHEW

It's not my fault-

PAUL

He's your brother.

MATTHEW

You're my brother.

PAUL

And what I say, goes.

MATTHEW

I won't be his friend.

PAUL

Then be his-

MATTHEW

Brother. I get it.

PAUL

MATTHEW

That's my price.

PAUL

Whatever happens, he started it.

RACHEL

Matt, th'griddle's busted! It needs to be replaced- I mean it!

MATTHEW

(to PAUL) I want you home come Christmas.

PAUL

I-

MATTHEW

And if y'can't do that, you're gonna phone. (to RACHEL) I'll take a look, hold your horses. Any sign of June?

RACHEL

Not yet.

MATTHEW

If she's late one more time--

RACHEL

She won't be.

MATTHEW

(to PAUL) I'll hold you to it.

LAUREL weasels out of the kitchen.

MATTHEW joins RACHEL.

PAUL

What's wrong?

LAUREL

You're unbelievable.

PAUL

You're mad.

LAUREL

You said they wouldn't mind.

PAUL

I squared it away just now--

LAUREL

You lied to me!

PAUL

Everything is taken care of!

LAUREL

And what was all that just now, with what's-his-name?

PAUL

I was roughing him up is all.

LAUREL

"Roughing him up"?

PAUL

I talked to Matthew about it, won't happen again.

LAUREL