

JOE THE REMEMBERER

By James Still

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(Z2)
stilljamesdean@gmail.com
Representation: Bret Adams, LTD
Bruce Ostler / Kate Bussert
212-765-5630

NOTE ON CASTING: Everything tells a story. In the same spirit in which I wrote the play, the characters of Joe and Amy may/can/should be played by actors of any race, ethnicity, origin and other-abledness. In whatever ways the play is cast, it will tell a story of remembering.

JOE THE REMEMBERER
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AN OLDER GUY -- let's call him JOE -- looks
at us.

Spend a minute looking at him, who is he?
There's nothing that particularly distinguishes
JOE, nothing out of the ordinary, nothing
extraordinary. Looking at him, JOE seems like
a regular Joe.

Look closer.
Maybe you notice that one sock is black, the
other navy blue. Not a big deal, it can happen to
anyone. Maybe he's drawn something elaborate
on his hand with an ink pen; or maybe he's
always turning one pocket on his pants inside
out, back in, back out... The little things. But
the things you'd notice only if you studied him.
It takes time.

Somewhere else there is a YOUNGER
WOMAN -- let's call her AMY. She's looking
at a laptop, looking away, looking at the laptop --
and finally hits a key. It seems to take courage.

Images of JOE and AMY both pop up in
separate boxes on a screen. Now we're
watching them both in person and on Zoom.

AMY smiles at JOE. She's gentle, warm,
careful.

AMY

Hello -- again.

JOE

(outburst)

I told you not to come in here before you admit the world's flat --

AMY

Joe --

and put that darn thing down --
JOE

Joe --
AMY

-- it's not Batman's fault that the door was broken!
JOE

AMY looks at JOE, nods -- not condescending.

Batman? Has he been here again?
AMY

You just missed him.
JOE

Sorry to hear that.
AMY

He told me not to tell you.
JOE

Then let's pretend I don't know.
AMY

OK. But what does that mean -- "pretend"???
JOE

AMY looks at JOE -- this is a new question.

You don't remember the word?
AMY

What word?
JOE

Pretend.
AMY

What does that mean?
JOE

AMY

You don't remember what it means to "pretend"?

JOE

Should I?

AMY

I don't know, nothing to worry about, it's probably overrated anyway.

JOE

What's overrated?

AMY

To pretend. Pretending.

JOE

Are we pretending now? What are we pretending to be?

AMY

So maybe you do remember what pretending means?

JOE

I don't think so. Is that something I used to do?

AMY

Yes... in a way. Do you remember?

JOE

...

AMY

You used to pretend.

JOE

Was that my job?

AMY

In a way.

JOE

Was it a good job?

AMY

I think so.

JOE
 What was I pretending to be?
 (...)
 I wonder.

AMY
 Maybe you remember a little bit?
 (...)
 Just a little?

JOE
 ...

AMY
 ...

JOE
 Tell me about the Old Joe.

AMY
 The Old Joe?

JOE
 The one I used to be.

AMY
 You don't remember?

JOE
 ...

AMY
 You used to be an actor.

JOE
 No, don't tell me about me. Tell me about the Old Joe. The one that came before me.

AMY
 Your father?

JOE
 Who? No.

AMY
 What do you mean by "the Old Joe"? Who is that?

JOE

C'mon -- The Old Joe -- the party I used to be before I stepped on a fish or slipped on a wish or --

AMY

Slow down, slow down.

JOE

(agitated)

You know, you know, the Old Joe. The one -- then. The one I used to be when I used to be -- me.

AMY

You're still you -- you're still Joe -- somewhere in there, you're still -- somewhere in there.

(...)

JOE

I used to be an actor.

AMY

That's right.

JOE

That's the Old Joe. The actor.

AMY

I understand now. Old Joe was a wonderful actor.

JOE

Did he remember his words?

AMY

He had an uncanny memory -- he could look at a page once, and then remember it all.

JOE

He could do that? That sounds like magic.

AMY

You're right -- it does, it really does. It sounds like -- magic. It probably was -- especially for an actor.

JOE

Was the Old Joe a good actor?

AMY
(positive)

Yes. He was --
wonderful.

(...)

JOE

That's good. Because good actors are good. Bad actors are bad.
What's an actor? I don't remember.

(...)

AMY

Um. Someone who pretends.

JOE

What does the Old Joe pretend?

AMY

He pretends to be someone else.

JOE

That sounds good too. If I weren't already someone else then I'd want to be someone else.

AMY

Who would you be?

JOE

I'd be Batman.

AMY

Who else would you be?

JOE

I'd be -- I'd be-- I'd be -- ... I don't know. Someone -- someone who remembers.

AMY

What does it mean to remember?

JOE

...

AMY

Joe? What does it mean to remember?

JOE

I'm trying to remember. It means -- to get it right. To not -- lose -- the thing. The word. The face. Remember.

AMY

Do you want to play pretend?

JOE

I don't know how. I don't remember. The Old Joe -- he pretends. He was an actor.

AMY

But what if you could pretend to be Old Joe who is pretending to be someone else?

JOE

That sounds confusing. But interesting.

AMY

Do you think you can pretend to be someone who remembers?

JOE

OK. But I don't remember how to pretend. What does it mean again?

AMY

It means to be someone else.

JOE

I'm already someone else. One day I turned into someone else, someone I don't know.

AMY

That must have been a scary.

JOE

No. It was just weird. But maybe it was scary too -- I -- I don't remember when it happened. I just remember one day it was true. Might have been yesterday.

AMY

So you do remember a little something. What else do you remember? Do you remember anything, Joe. Do you remember me?

JOE

I want to, I really do. I remember -- remember... that word is -- uhhh -- another word, please.

AMY

Do you ever think about being in a play? Being on stage? Wearing a costume --

Am I doing that now? JOE

No, this is just us talking. AMY

But you're not here -- you're -- JOE
(to the computer screen)
-- you're in there. Can you see me? Hello.

Hello, Joe. I can see you. And you're right, we're not in the same room, exactly. AMY

JOE looks around.

Where are you then? JOE

I'm in California. AMY

Is that far away? JOE

It is. But I used to come and visit you in person, before I got my new job and had to move -- AMY

To California? JOE

That's right. But we used to sit together in the same room. Remember? AMY

You used to come and see me? JOE

Remember? AMY

(...) JOE

Anyway. So now I visit you like this, just us, talking. I'm sorry I can't hug you. AMY

JOE

It feels like I'm in a play.

AMY

Yes?

JOE

I re-re-remem.. I'm -- there used to be an audience -- there! Out there. They pretend they're in the dark but I can see them.

AMY

Who are they?

JOE

I don't know, I really don't know -- they're just people. I don't know them. But it's the faces of those people -- the ones who are looking at me with -- something -- something on their faces. They make me want to cry.

AMY

Why?

JOE

(shrugs)

They help me remember I'm not alone.

AMY

So when you were an actor -- and you had an audience --

JOE

They were just people who wanted to hear a story. Sometimes it would get so quiet I could hear them breathing.

AMY

So maybe you need an audience now. Maybe I'm your audience.

JOE

Maybe.

(he looks out at US)

Or maybe they're the audience.

Without warning, JOE launches into King Lear, transformed for only a moment:

JOE (CONT'D)

*"I am a very foolish, fond old man,
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less;
And to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you, and know this man."*

AMY

Wow.

JOE

Hm?

AMY

You remembered something.

JOE

Did I?

AMY

King Lear.

JOE

Who?

AMY

It's Shakespeare -- from a play, from when you were in a play.

JOE

I -- I used to be a -- a -- ...

AMY

An actor.

JOE

No. A rememberer. Is that a -- a -- is that a word? Rememberer.

AMY

I think so.

They look at each other. JOE leans in closer.

JOE

You seem familiar. Do I know you?

AMY holds up a mug that says “World’s Best Dad”.

AMY

Look what I brought with me to California -- remember when I got this for you?

JOE

...

AMY

Remember?

JOE

...

AMY puts the mug down and looks at JOE with kindness. She leans in toward her screen, nearly touching it, softly “kisses” JOE.

JOE doesn’t seem to understand.

They look at each other.

They look at each other.

Both of them are searching for someone they used to know.

JOE looks out at US.

He sees us.

He nods.

And the play is over.