

FIX ME, JESUS
BY HELEN SNEED



DRAMATISTS
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FIX ME, JESUS
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FIX ME, JESUS
is dedicated to the memory of
Laurence Jolidon and Dwight Bowes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Heartfelt gratitude to: Milly Barranger, Susan Bergstrom, Jan Buttram, Deborah Cavanaugh, Alma Cuervo, Beth Elliott, David Finkle, Reagan Fletcher, Pat Galloway, Peter Hagan, Andrew Martin, Gwenn Nusbaum, Kim Sharp, Kaysie Sneed, Dale Terilli, Robert Vaughan, Amy Wagner, Peter Webb, and the superb cast of the Abingdon Theatre Company production.

The world premiere of FIX ME, JESUS was produced by Abingdon Theatre Company (Jan Buttram, Artistic Director; Heather Henderson, Managing Director) in New York City on November 11, 2013. It was directed by Sam Pinkleton; the set and costume designs were by Christopher Ford and Dakota Rose; the lighting design was by Vadim Ledvin; the original music and sound design were by Margaret Pine; and the production stage manager was Deidre Works. The cast was as follows:

MRS. CRAIGLee Roy Rogers
ANNABELLPolly Lee
YOUNG ANNABELL..... Kate Froemmling
MOTHER..... Lori Gardner
GRANDMOTHER..... Lisa McMillan
DR. MAXWELL FELD.....Mitch Tebo

CHARACTERS

MRS. CRAIG — Mid-50s.

A sales clerk at Neiman Marcus.

ANNABELL ARMSTRONG — 33.

Thin, attractive, intelligent.

YOUNG ANNABELL — 10.

Intelligent, precocious.

MOTHER — Late 30s.

Very beautiful.

GRANDMOTHER — Mid-60s.

Vigorous. Resolute. Dressed in black.

DR. MAXWELL FELD — Hovering near 50.

A psychiatrist. Nondescript appearance.

The female characters are native Texans. Neither their hair nor their accents are big. Mrs. Craig's Texas accent is the strongest. Mother's and Grandmother's are softer and almost Southern. Annabell's is virtually nonexistent except when she uses it for effect. Dr. Feld is a New Yorker and sounds like one.

PLACE

Dallas, Texas.

TIME

November 1986.

Fix Me, Jesus

*Oh fix me, oh fix me, oh fix me
Fix me, Jesus, fix me*

*Fix me for my long white robe
Fix me, Jesus, fix me
Fix me for my starry crown
Fix me, Jesus, fix me*

*Oh fix me, oh fix me, oh fix me
Fix me, Jesus, fix me*

*Fix me for my dying bed
Fix me, Jesus, fix me
Fix me for my journey home
Fix me, Jesus, fix me*

*Oh fix me, oh fix me, oh fix me
Fix me, Jesus, fix me*

—Anonymous
African-American Spiritual

FIX ME, JESUS

In the dark, the spiritual “Fix Me, Jesus” is heard, sung by a woman.

A key is heard jangling against other keys, then turning the lock. As the lights come up, a figure is seen entering through the door upstage left carrying a bundle draped over both arms that resembles a body. The figure struggles to place the “body” carefully on a chair. With the lights up, the person is seen to be Mrs. Craig, who begins to separate the layers of the large bundle and to hang them on a rack attached to the wall upstage. They are very expensive dresses.

Upstage center, facing the audience, is a wide, tall triptych mirror, the middle panel stationary, the right and left panels adjustable. In front of the mirror is a two-step wooden block used for alterations. The room contains two chairs stage left with a small table between them. A long cushioned bench is situated stage right.

The setting is a dressing room in Neiman Marcus at NorthPark mall in Dallas, Texas. It is November 1986.

P.A. SYSTEM. Cashmere, cashmere, cashmere. Sweaters perfect for the big game or an intimate dinner. See the exquisite fall colors in Separates on the mezzanine.

ANNABELL. (*Offstage.*) Mrs. Craig. Mrs. Craig. Where are you?

MRS. CRAIG. Right here in number 2, dear. (*Annabell Armstrong bursts into the dressing room, laden with shopping bags and a big purse, all of which she dumps on the floor.*)

ANNABELL. God, I hate nature. (*Hurriedly removes fur coat and, without noticing, drops it on top of the dresses in the chair.*) Nature.

Didn't even get my hair color right. And now this — eighty-six degrees in mid-November. I am using the air conditioner in my car so I won't suffocate to death in my fur coat which isn't even paid for yet. MRS. CRAIG. Let me just ... (*Extricates two dresses from beneath Annabell's coat.*)

ANNABELL. Nature. Texas. Evil. It's a conspiracy to humiliate me tonight.

MRS. CRAIG. ... *Rescue* the merchandise. (*She hangs dresses with others to be tried and begins to put Annabell's things to the side.*)

ANNABELL. Please forgive me, I'm desperate. I've got one hour to save my life. (*Looks at watch.*) Fifty-five minutes!

MRS. CRAIG. Annabell, you're always in a crisis.

ANNABELL. This is different. All the others were just practice.

MRS. CRAIG. I've been watching you smack-dab in the middle of all that scandal. How are your mother and daddy taking it?

ANNABELL. You know Daddy. He said, "Oh, I am just suffocated with joy."

MRS. CRAIG. Well, you've sure been in the news a lot lately. Your picture on the front page of both papers. There you were, Ms. Annabell Armstrong, surrounded by a whole lot of black people ...

ANNABELL. "The White Woman Who Turned Out the Black Vote." Not that it did any good.

MRS. CRAIG. Well, you looked beautiful. (*She adjusts the side panels of the mirror.*)

ANNABELL. No, I just looked white.

MRS. CRAIG. But you're way too thin. Have you lost more weight?

ANNABELL. Lost weight. Lost the election by eighteen points. November 5, 1986. The biggest defeat for a Democratic gubernatorial candidate in Texas history. Democracy, why bother?

MRS. CRAIG. Marie voted for your man. She gets such a kick out of you being in politics. Says it's high time you ran for office.

ANNABELL. Tell her she's not the only one. How's she doing?

MRS. CRAIG. She's running me ragged. That girl is like a hummingbird on sugar water. We're rolling over to the movies tonight. *Top Gun!*

ANNABELL. That sounds so ... bucolic. Fine, don't worry about me. While you're at the movies, I'll be at the Dallas Country Club surrounded by four hundred Republicans with no sense of humor. And no hips. After what I did, most of them are ready to kill me. I can't face them if I don't look fabulous.

MRS. CRAIG. Then why did you wait till the last minute? Shopping for all this stuff? (*Indicates shopping bags.*)

ANNABELL. Because I have been betrayed. By nature. Oh, I have the perfect dress — deep, rich, royal blue velvet. The very color of my ring. The only dress in which I have ever felt supreme self-confidence. It's autumn, "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness." The weatherman *swore* a cold front was coming in this afternoon. But no, a heat wave in mid-November. Eighty-six degrees. If I wore velvet tonight, I'd perspire so much I'd drown myself.

MRS. CRAIG. Annabell. This is Neiman Marcus. We'll find you a dress.

ANNABELL. We have to. It's the most important evening of my life. (*Pause.*) Mrs. Craig, I am terribly, madly in love.

MRS. CRAIG. Annabell! What wonderful news.

ANNABELL. He'll be there tonight.

MRS. CRAIG. Your parents must be so pleased.

ANNABELL. But they haven't met him yet. It all happens tonight. Big old family wedding, Church of the Good Shepherd, massive reception at the Dallas Country Club, right there in front of God and everybody.

MRS. CRAIG. This is serious. We'd better get to work. Now you cool down and get undressed. I'm going to get you a nice cold drink. (*Exits.*)

ANNABELL. Bless you, Mrs. Craig. You have a genius for soothing my craven soul. If I had one. (*Shuts the door.*) I can't believe I just told her that. The weather has made me crazy. I am *burning up!* (*Rustles through shopping bags, pulls out Sunday New York Times. Plucks Book Review and begins to fan her face.*) "If only to go warm were gorgeous."

Ha. The heat makes my head perspire uncontrollably. Just my head. Like my brain is incontinent. "Head-sweats." To avert head-sweats is my *raison d'être*. I hate the heat. It's unnatural. (*Stops fanning. Sees cover of Book Review.*) New Trollope biography. *From Abandoned Child to Man of Letters ...* (*Begins to read review with interest.*)

MRS. CRAIG. (*Opens door and enters.*) Annabell! This is no time to be reading. You've got more important things to do. (*Places glass of ice and can of Diet Dr. Pepper on a small table between the chairs.*)

ANNABELL. According to this review, Trollope's inner child wrote fifty-six books in order to compensate for his terrible mother.

MRS. CRAIG. Annabell —

ANNABELL. Think how many I could write. It's a shame I have no talent.

MRS. CRAIG. Annabell Armstrong, you don't have time for the inner child. (*Snatches Book Review.*)

ANNABELL. I don't have an inner child, Mrs. Craig. When I lost half my body weight, the inner child was the first to go, poor creature. I do have an inner adult, but we have nothing in common.

MRS. CRAIG. You need to focus, Annabell. Now, who's getting married tonight?

ANNABELL. My cousin, Diana Cockrell. The seventh Cockrell wedding. And the last. The final union of the seventh perfect Cockrell cousin to marry a perfect, rich white boy just like her. I've spent my entire life as the perfect foil to their beauty.

MRS. CRAIG. You'll look lovely. You —

ANNABELL. It's so humiliating. I'm always off to the side, old enough to be the child's mother. Fat, inferior, hair soaking wet. Everyone in Dallas laughing at me. They know why I never got married. Didn't want to pass crippling head-sweats to another generation.

MRS. CRAIG. I'd laugh, but I don't have the time. (*Unfastens Annabell's dress.*) Now, Annabell, I'm dying to know. Are you engaged? (*Takes Annabell's hands and checks them.*) Why, you're just wearing that big old sapphire ring your daddy gave you. Right out of the Neiman Marcus catalogue. You need something pretty for your left hand too. *Please* tell me. Who is he?

ANNABELL. It's a little, uh, complicated. A secret actually. At this point in time.

MRS. CRAIG. Don't worry — these dressing rooms are full of secrets.

ANNABELL. I'm making it sound like Watergate. If you knew his identity you would turn into Deep Throat.

MRS. CRAIG. If you're not going to tell me, then get started on these dresses.

ANNABELL. All right. All right. Let us commence.

MRS. CRAIG. Do you want me to stay?

ANNABELL. No thanks, I'll spare you. It won't be pretty.

MRS. CRAIG. I'll be right outside if you need anything. (*Mrs. Craig closes the door behind her. Annabell begins to undress hurriedly, with her back to the mirror.*)

P.A. SYSTEM. Ladies, you still have time to look your best for the holidays. Neiman Marcus invites you to a rejuvenating weekend at its legendary spa, the Golden Door.

ANNABELL. How can this be happening? Frock trauma. How petty. How dire. Don't panic. He says I'm beautiful. Beautiful, desirable, thin, thin, thin! (*Turns halfway toward mirror. Stops.*) I'm talking to myself. Lissome. Fair. Do shut up! (*Freezes. Pauses.*) Silence is not effective. Fine, I'll talk myself through this. A soliloquy. Like Molly Bloom. "Yes, yes —" (*She stands in her slip, turns to face her reflection in the mirror. A hand from behind the mirror adjusts the upstage panel.*)

MOTHER'S VOICE. Annabell, Annabell!

ANNABELL. "Yes!" (*Looks at herself in the mirror. Winces.*) God. (*Young Annabell slips from behind mirror and lies on the bench. She takes a book, Anna Karenina, from Annabell's shopping bag and begins to read it. Annabell neither sees nor hears the child or Mother, nor can they see or hear her.*)

MOTHER'S VOICE. Annabell, sweetheart, what are you doing in there? Are you reading again?

YOUNG ANNABELL. Yes, Mother. (*Mother enters from behind the mirror. She's wearing evening attire — a burgundy gown, impeccable, breathtakingly beautiful, slightly out of breath. Young Annabell switches Anna Karenina for another book.*)

MOTHER. You read too much! It's not —

YOUNG ANNABELL. I am reading the Holy Bible. If you and Daddy must go out to a big party and leave me here alone, then I must turn to God for companionship and succor.

MOTHER. This from a ten-year-old. You're not alone tonight and you know it. Minerva is downstairs with your supper. You can pray together. Now hurry up, I can't keep your father waiting.

YOUNG ANNABELL. But I want to go with you —

ANNABELL. This is hopeless. (*Whispers.*) Slender, fair — adequate?

MOTHER. You wouldn't like it. The party's for grownups. (*Pauses.*) Annabell, do I look all right? This dress is supposed to be the latest fashion for 1963. (*Mother crosses over and stands before the mirror. Young Annabell gazes at her mother's reflection in the glass.*)

YOUNG ANNABELL. You're perfect.

ANNABELL. I can't be fixed. (*Turns away from mirror.*) Shit. He's counting on me. I need an Old Testament miracle!

MOTHER. (*As she turns and looks at her back.*) Oh look. Your father missed a button.

YOUNG ANNABELL. I'll fix it for you. (*She hops up on fitting stool and buttons her mother's dress.*) There!

FIX ME, JESUS

by Helen Sneed

1M, 4W, 1 Girl

In a Neiman Marcus changing room in Dallas, on the most important day of her life, Annabell Armstrong frantically searches for the perfect dress. A rising star in the Texas Democratic Party, Annabell is trapped in the Reagan eighties. Her political career, love affair, finances, and family relations are in crisis; and strong-minded characters from her past begin to appear from behind the changing room mirror. *FIX ME, JESUS* is a dark comedy — the hilarious, timely, and poignant story of a woman who finds herself at the epicenter of history and politics, struggling for personal independence and social justice against the lifelong theft of her own power.

“... a manifestation of a lifetime of accumulated anxieties and emotional traumas, as evidenced by the memories that wander, unwanted, into the store’s dressing room.”
—**The New York Times**

“FIX ME, JESUS is a brilliant emotional roller coaster ride ... There’s humor, love, laughter, and high fashion ... not to be missed.”
—**BroadwayWorld.com**

“Witty Democratic commentary is far from the entirety of this piece. Its emotional heart is equally well plumbed. Characters are incisively dramatized and adroitly illuminated ... engrossing, entertaining, and clever.”
—**WomanAroundTown.com**

“[Helen Sneed] has a true gift for comedy that doesn’t sacrifice true character for laugh lines; and she fully exploits Texas for all the sass it has to offer.”
—**TheaterPizzazz.com**

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ISBN 978-0-8222-3102-8



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