

youthESource Drama

City Without Time to Forgive

by Ron Unger

Cast:

Traveler

Innkeeper

Townspeople: 1,2,3,4

(Setting: the lobby of a hotel. Traveler steps up to registration desk, rings bell, innkeeper appears.)

Traveler: I wonder if you have any vacancies?

Innkeeper: Always. That's one thing we've got plenty of, vacancies. New in town?

Traveler: Just arrived. I've never been here before.

Innkeeper: Well, then, welcome to Vengefulville.

Traveler: Vengefulville? But the map said Pleasant City.

Innkeeper: Oh, we all know what the map says. But we locals call it Vengefulville.

Traveler: Seems to be a sleepy little town.

Innkeeper: One of the finest I've ever known. Never any trouble here. No sheriff, no police, no jail, no courthouse.

Traveler: That's certainly quiet and quaint. Don't see many people on the streets.

Innkeeper: Most people stay inside. It's safer that way.

Traveler: Safer?

Innkeeper: Yup. Sign here and I'll issue you your official Punch Card.

Traveler: Punch Card?

Innkeeper: That's right. Everybody in Vengefulville has to have a Punch Card. See mine? See theirs? *(Points to others in lobby. Officiously stamps a card, strung on a ribbon or chain, and places it over the traveler's head, around his neck.)* There. You're all set. Don't see one of those very often: a clean Card.

Traveler: I still don't understand. This must be some local custom. Please explain it to me.

Innkeeper: Oh, that'll come soon enough. You're in room 5, top of the stairs. I suggest you lock yourself in, call room service for meals, and unless you have business here, leave town first thing in the morning.

Traveler: You wouldn't be a very good spokesman for the Chamber of Commerce.

Innkeeper: Don't have one. All the business except mine left town years ago. *(Traveler picks up suitcase, moves through lobby, bumps into a man.)*

1: Hey, Man, look where you're going! *(Pulls punch out of his pocket and punches hole in Traveler's card.)* I get one punch for that.

Traveler: Sorry, I didn't mean any harm. Didn't see you.

1: "Sorry" isn't good enough. Not in Vengefulville. We ran out of "sorries" a long time ago.

Traveler: Look, don't get so upset. It was only an accident.

2: *(Steps up to address Traveler.)* Are you picking a fight with my friend? We don't allow that here. Let me have that card of yours *(pulls out a punch and punches T's card)*. I'd watch my step if I were you. That's two you've got.

Traveler: *(Makes his way back to registration desk, speaks to Innkeeper.)* Whew! What was all that about?

Innkeeper: Can't say I didn't warn you. See that card of yours? Two punches. Most of us have got six. Seven and you're out *(makes slit-through gesture)* .

Traveler: You mean out . . . as in DEAD?

Innkeeper: That's right. Had a fellow like you come in just last month. Got his card filled up in record time: two hours and 15 minutes. He's buried out back. Told you to be careful. Of course, I told him too, but it didn't do any good.

Traveler: Wait a minute. Do I get this right? You go around punching each other's cards and execute people when they've accumulated seven? Why, that's the most absurd thing I've ever heard of!

Innkeeper: *(Reaches for his punch.)* Hey, watch who you're calling absurd *(punches Traveler's card)*. My grandfather proposed that law. It's the only one we've got. Only one we need.

Traveler: You mean there's no forgiveness here?

Innkeeper: Forgiveness? What's that? This is Vengefulville . I told you that.

Traveler: *(Appealing to others in lobby)*. Hasn't anyone here ever heard of forgiveness?

3: I seem to recall the word, but forget what it means exactly.

4: My father mentioned it once, but that was just before he got his seventh punch.

Traveler: Don't you have any old-timers here who might remember?

2: Nobody gets very old in Vengefulville .

3: Most are executed before they're 30. Oldest woman in the county is 37 and she's some kind of saint.

1: Nobody's seen her for over 10 years. Doesn't let anyone come near the farm. She just kind of went into hiding when she got her fifth punch over some squabble at the last church bazaar.

Traveler: Oh! You do have a church, then?

Innkeeper: Not any more. It just didn't stand to reason. People seemed to get more punches there than just about any place else.

1: Haven't been able to get a new minister since Pastor Schmidt got his seventh punch at a Voters Meeting eight years ago.

Traveler: Wait a minute! That's no way to live ! *(All chuckle)*

1: Most folks here are dead!

Traveler: And the rest are probably in hiding, afraid to talk with each other or make a mistake. There's got to be a better way. Have you ever heard of grace or mercy?

2: Had a waitress here in the hotel named Grace. She got her seventh when she spilled some coffee on Jack here. Cafe's been closed ever since.

Traveler: This is a nightmare! I've got to get out of this town. Can I call for a taxi to the train station?

Innkeeper: Our only cabdriver, George, doesn't even answer the phone anymore. Not since he got his sixth. You'll have to walk.

1: But don't talk to anyone. Folks may all seem shy, but they're a mean lot.

Traveler: Frightened is probably more like it. Say, do you have any Bibles in the rooms here?

Innkeeper: Used to, way back. But maids kept stealing them. Led to a lot of deaths. So we removed them. Too big a temptation.

Traveler: I'll leave you mine. If you'll all take some time to read it, you'll find a better way of living . Or just plain living! *(Turns to leave.)*

Innkeeper: Wait a minute. Going to leave without paying, were you? *(Takes out punch.)*

Discussion: What would it be like to live in a community without forgiveness? How long could any of us live without God's mercy? How long do we live because of it?

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