



**ALL THE
WAYS TO
SAY I LOVE
YOU**

BY **NEIL LABUTE**



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
INC.



ALL THE WAYS TO SAY I LOVE YOU
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ALL THE WAYS TO SAY I LOVE YOU had its world premiere at MCC Theater (Robert LuPone, Bernard Telsey, and William Cantler, Artistic Directors; Blake West, Executive Director), on September 28, 2016. It was directed by Leigh Silverman; set design was by Rachel Hauck; costume design was by Emily Rebholz; lighting design was by Matt Frey; sound design was by Bart Fasbender; and the prop master was Raphael Mishler. It was performed by Judith Light.

CHARACTERS

MRS. JOHNSON

“i have everything, yet have nothing..”

—jean racine

ALL THE WAYS TO SAY I LOVE YOU

Silence. Darkness.

A chair. Center stage. That is all.

After a moment, a woman enters and sits. Several files in one hand that go to her lap when she is settled in the chair.

*She sits quietly for a moment, listening to the sound of an old classic playing somewhere. One of the greats, like Peggy Lee or Nina Simone.**

Someone like that.

As this fades away, she begins to speak:

MRS. JOHNSON. ...“how much?” she wonders.

Beat.

A girl in my class. “What is the weight of a lie?” And at first, I think perhaps I haven’t heard her correctly. I say “What?” and I ask her to repeat what she’s said...but I didn’t mishear her...I have heard her correctly. “How much does a lie weigh?” She wants to know...*but* in ounces...or pounds...or however you would do it. Weigh it out. See, I had once made reference to the weight of a “soul”...which has been argued over by scholars and poets and priests for years...and I had mentioned it once in passing, and so here she is now, asking the same thing about a “lie.” How much it might weigh. The *weight* of it. Her father is a butcher and *that’s* what she wants to know...the weight of a lie in practical terms...and for once...I don’t have an answer. I pride myself on answers. It’s the sign of a good teacher, or that’s what I’ve been taught, anyway...a million years ago. Not even

* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.

the right one, that isn't even important, but to offer up *an* answer. That's what our job is. As instructors. Guides. Teachers. To put forth a possibility, one idea or an assumption or...a truth, even, if such a thing really exists out there—the *truth*—*that* is what we do. We are asked things every day...over and over...and each time we must take the time to give an answer back. If it's right, then that's a wonderful thing...and if it's wrong, then together we will discover that and work it out as a team, in groups of two or three or *ten*—as an entire classroom, even—and we will find out what is right and what is wrong. But that first one...that *initial* answer...that's for me to say. To teach. To lead. To be an example. I've done it for thirty years now, or something very close to that...and I love it. It's what I was meant to do with my life and I think I still do it with a kind of passion and energy and...well, with a kind of *zest*, even...that speaks for itself. And yet...I had nothing for this girl who asked me about lies and their weight and, I mean, rationally I think, "Well, it's probably subjective, in some way...each one must weigh a certain amount based on this and this or that...but now I wonder if that is true. I wonder if they don't all just weigh the same..."

Beat.

It's years since whomever it was wrote that paper...posed that question to me...but I've thought about it many times since then. And the answer...if there is a correct one out there in the universe somewhere...it has alluded me...no matter how much I puzzle over it or Google it or try to track it down...

Beat.

"What is the weight of a lie...?"

She puts one folder aside and glances at another one. She indicates the pages within and then begins to speak.

But this is not about that...this is about *this*...

Holds up a file.

...and only this and of course it's why you're here. And so that's what we'll do...we will talk about this and not that...not about lies and how much they may or may not weigh. And who knows? The truth...in the end, might surprise us all...even me.

Beat.

Yes, even *me*.

*She rustles through a few more pages and then turns to us.
Begins to tell her story.*

...he was a good-looking boy but I don't think that's why he was the one I chose. I mean, it didn't hurt anything, obviously, but...that was not the *reason* that I picked him...not just that, anyway. I'm not really a "looks" person...so...no.

Beat.

He walked into my office one afternoon...this was a Thursday, I think...might've been on a Friday, I usually did a half-day on Fridays but that winter semester I remember I was doing a few longer days end of the week so I could build up my holidays...we were planning on taking a few extra days over the spring break and this was making that possible...Eric and I, that's what we'd planned for our vacation. When you're a teacher, it becomes important to just go with the flow...take your days off when everybody else does and to embrace the summertime because very quickly it was August again and there you go, back to the classroom and starting over on whatever it is that your specialty is. I do English. Well, English and Drama, but what that means is I pick a play each year for the "Drama Club" to perform—in the fall—and help out with the spring musical. Nothing musical on my part...I can barely *whistle* a note...but the dramatic or comedic bits. The *acting*. I would oversee those parts and then also all the settings, too...get my students involved in building the sets and that sort of thing...make up and ticket sales, all the other aspects of production when the time came. That's what I would do.

Beat.

He came to my office when I was in the process of picking the play for the coming year, in fact—I was also a counselor for grade twelve as well—and he was assigned to me after his usual counselor was out on her maternity leave...so...that's how we ended up together, on that Thursday. Or Friday. Whichever it was.

Beat.

He had actually been a student of mine during his first year at school...my school, I mean. Jefferson High. Ninth grade...but I

don't think he remembered it. We were doing *Lord of the Flies* and most kids can recall the year they read that, it's one of those books that usually...well...it has the ability to leave some kind of mark on everybody who reads it...especially the boys, but Tommy was out a lot that year...I think his mom was getting a divorce—*another* one...from the sound of the gossip around school...or the teacher's lounge, anyway...and that's never easy for a kid...no matter what age you are or how many times you go through it...it's just never easy. I know that part for a fact.

Beat.

And I think Tommy had gone through it a *lot*...a couple times already. Once or twice, at least. That's what it said in his file, anyway, but that information is not always accurate and it's not something you can just blurt right out and ask a student, first time you meet 'em. Or *counsel* them, anyway. He dropped plenty of hints, of course, small things...stuff that you wouldn't actually be able to call him on if you needed to...things about his stepfather and how much he hated the guy and that sort of thing...it felt like he was covering for his mom and he probably was. Kids do that. Cover. No matter what you do to them, no matter how horrible you act...kids love their moms...that is just a fact.

Beat.

Anyhow, Tommy's mother had made yet another mistake in life and love and it was her son who was trying to make it all better—and I see that behavior every day of the week in this job, and I mean *every damn day*...

Beat.

I'm not someone who swears a lot, but occasionally this job gets to you...

Beat.

And *that* is an understatement.

Beat.

It ALWAYS gets to you...just sometimes more than others.

She stops at this, unsure whether to go on or not.

His grades weren't terrible, actually. I mean...yes, not great...but for

a second-year senior who had been to the office practically every day of his life and a person who had no assistance at home what-so-ever and probably also had some kind of behavior disorder—I don't think he was bipolar or ADHD, or anything like that, but he was definitely one of those people who could change the temperature in a classroom just by staring out the window or asking a question or, you know, making a face...a face like...you know...like *this*.

She attempts to recreate the face.

That face that says, “This sucks, man...”

Beat.

I mentioned Eric a minute ago, didn't I? Said his name, at least, without saying who he is or...sorry! I do that on occasion, not that I mean to, or...I'm not scattered, I'm definitely not that—I've received two different citations for my teaching over the years, and one of them was *city-wide*—but, yes, I can be a little forgetful sometimes. Or get off on a tangent...like I am right now. Sorry!

Beat.

“Eric.” My husband.

Beat.

He's of *mixed-race*...not that this is how I see him or think of him or whatnot...I don't...not firstly, anyhow, but it's something that he's very...what's the right way to...he takes a certain *pride* in it. I think he does...maybe now more than he did when I first met him. Eric is quick to point it out and wears it around a bit. Not, like, in your face, I don't mean that, but since the last few elections...you know what I'm saying. There is a kind of...*pride* there that was not necessarily as evident previous to that time.

Beat.

He certainly used it along the way...during college and admission to law school, with some loans or...not even that...not for loans but the other ones, the what-do-you-call-'ems? Umm...the free ones...? (*Considering.*) Grants. He received quite a few grants in his time for government funds...as a result of his being “mixed.” That's probably not even the proper term anymore...“mixed”...it all changes so quickly and so often...what we can call people who are colored. AND I don't mean *colored*, I know *that's* wrong, of course—

ALL THE WAYS TO SAY I LOVE YOU

by Neil LaBute

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Mrs. Johnson is a high school English teacher and guidance counselor in a loving marriage. As she recounts her experiences with a favored student from her past, Mrs. Johnson slowly reveals the truth that is hidden just beneath the surface details of her life. *ALL THE WAYS TO SAY I LOVE YOU* is a solo play about love, hard choices, and the cost of fulfilling an all-consuming desire.

"[ALL THE WAYS TO SAY I LOVE YOU] is a throwback to a favorite form of Mr. LaBute's earlier days: the one-act monologue in which an ostensibly sunny soul strips down to dark shadows."

—**The New York Times**

"It's a testament to...the effectiveness of LaBute's prose that you may handily forget [his] Mrs. Johnson is duplicitous, irresponsible...and to some degree disconnected from reality. ...exquisitely interesting material..."

—**NBC New York**

"Leave it to Neil LaBute to find a heretofore unknown...way to express one's love. ...As anyone who knows LaBute's work can expect, a creeping primal darkness ensnares us in what appears to be an ordinary life."

—**Newsday**

Also by Neil LaBute
THE MONEY SHOT
REASONS TO BE PRETTY
THE WAY WE GET BY
and others

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ISBN 978-0-8222-3665-8

