



ASSISTANCE

BY LESLYE HEADLAND



DRAMATISTS
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ASSISTANCE
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Playwrights Horizons, Inc., New York City, produced the New York City Premiere of ASSISTANCE Off-Broadway in 2012.

In addition, The following acknowledgment must appear on the title page in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the Play:

ASSISTANCE received its World Premiere
by the IAMA Theatre Company, Los Angeles, CA in 2008.

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SPECIAL NOTE ON EPIGRAPH

Excerpt from *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* — Copyright © 1996 by Studs Terkel. Reprinted by permission of The New Press. www.thenewpress.com

For Lucas

ASSISTANCE was presented Off-Broadway by Playwrights Horizons (Tim Sanford, Artistic Director; Leslie Marcus, Managing Director; Carol Fishman, General Manager), opening on February 28, 2012. It was directed by Trip Cullman; the set design was by David Korins; the costume design was by Jessica Pabst; the lighting design was by Ben Stanton; the sound design was by Jill BC Du Boff; and the production stage manager was Kyle Gates. The cast was as follows:

NICK Michael Esper
NORA Virginia Kull
VINCE Lucas Near-Verbrughe
HEATHER Sue Jean Kim
JENNY Amy Rosoff
JUSTIN Bobby Steggert

ASSISTANCE was presented by IAMA Theatre Company at the Working Stage Theater in Los Angeles, California, opening on April 18, 2008. It was directed by Annie McVey; the set design was by Whitney Whetston; the costume design was by Louise Munson; the lighting design was by CJ Longhammer; and the sound design was by David McGuire. The cast was as follows

NICK Adam Shapiro
NORA Katie Lowes
VINCE Graham Sibley
HEATHER Stefanie Black
JENNY Amy Rosoff
JUSTIN Wes Whitehead

CHARACTERS

NICK

NORA

VINCE

HEATHER

JENNY

JUSTIN

Work is, by its very nature, about violence — to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us.

—Studs Terkel, *Working*

ASSISTANCE

Scene 1

Evening.

Manhattan. Somewhere below Canal Street. 8 P.M.

We are in the antechamber of an affluent man's office. The office belongs to their boss, Daniel Weisinger. The assistants work in the antechamber.

We don't have any idea what business they are in.

Daniel's office is tucked away upstage. Unoccupied. His office door is ajar. Through it, we see hints of his expensive tastes and luxurious lifestyle.

The antechamber is the exact opposite. A miserable prison. Exposed brick. Bleak walls. An ominous clock. Bookcases stuffed with binders. Filing cabinets spill over with manila folders. FedEx packages, inter-office envelopes and unopened mail. Fax machines, printers, and scanners. Coffee machine.

There are three desks. Each desk is equipped with a laptop computer, a desk phone with headset, and legal pads and pens.

In two of these desks sit Nick and Vince.

Nick (mid-to late 20s) is a goofy guy with a genuine wit and charm that he dulls down to a slapstick "buddy" persona for the office environment.

Vince (mid- to late 20s.) is a slick frat boy, definitely going places. His desk is cleaner than Nick's. Next to him, on the floor, is a small box of personal belongings.

They type away in silence. Vince sighs loud and hard.

NICK. *(Re: Vince's sigh.)* What was that?

VINCE. The new girl was supposed to start today.

NICK. New girl ...

VINCE. Never got around to training her.

NICK. ... Hmm ...

VINCE. Shit. It's eight. She's been in the lobby since four.

NICK. ... Yeah ... soooooooo ...

VINCE. I hate girls.

NICK. ... I know ...

VINCE. They're so stressful.

NICK. ... I am so listening to you ...

VINCE. Train her tonight. Like really quickly.

NICK. Why am I training her? You're leaving.

VINCE. You're staying.

NICK. Exactly.

VINCE. Exactly.

NICK. I'm sorry. What are we talking about? I did too much smack today.

VINCE. New girl. Lobby since four.

NICK. It's eight ... I'm training her — Why?

VINCE. You interviewed her.

NICK. Because I'm staying.

VINCE. So you train her.

NICK. Because you're leaving? *(Nick and Vince imitate their boss, Daniel. Note: The Assistants' Daniel imitations should NOT strive for realistic representation but recall children playfully exaggerating a teacher. Their voices go to a nasal growl. Their physicality resembles a cross between a velociraptor and an overweight cat.)*

VINCE. *(As Daniel.)* “Do you GET it, Nick? I mean, Nick, I mean, you get it, right?”

NICK. *(As Daniel.)* “Oooh! Ooof!”

VINCE. *(As Daniel.)* “I mean, you GEEEEEE-yet EE-ut?!”

NICK. *(As Daniel.)* “Oooooooh! Is that my new girl right THAAAAAAR!!!”

VINCE. *(As Daniel.)* “Jiminy Crickets!” *(They type. A pause.)*

NICK. How long do you think she’ll last?

VINCE. New girl?

NICK. She’s coming from Canal Street.

VINCE. Yikes. Three months?

NICK. You don’t even know how long she’s been at Canal Street.

VINCE. Six weeks-ish.

NICK. How did you know that?

VINCE. It’s called paying attention. You should check it out. Completely painless procedure.

NICK. Crickets.

VINCE. *(As Daniel.)* “Neeeeeeee-yuk.” *(The phone rings. It’s deafening. Both boys put on their headsets. Vince answers the call. [Note: The Assistants almost always use headsets when on calls.] Daniel Weisinger’s office. (He mutes his headset. [Note: The Assistants do this often. It is done by pressing a button on their phone.] To Nick.)* Get Harris.

NICK. Getting Harris. *(Vince un-mutes himself. Nick dials.)*

VINCE. *(To Daniel.)* Uh-huh. Okay. Yep. Yep. That email came in earlier. *(Reads an email off his laptop.)* “Dear Daniel, we received the new contract. Below are our concerns regarding — ” *(Daniel interrupts Vince. Vince writes on his legal pad. [Note: This happens a lot. They are being interrupted by Daniel and take notes on his requests.])* Yep. Got it.

NICK. Hello, Harris-MENT ... *(He winks at Vince. Vince mutes himself.)*

VINCE. *(To Nick.)* Stop doing that. *(Vince un-mutes himself.)*

NICK. ... we’ve got Daniel calling for you. *(Nick puts his call on hold.)*

VINCE. *(To Daniel.)* Yep. Okay. And we have Harris. Just a moment. *(Vince puts Daniel on hold.)* Which line? Two?

NICK. Harris loves his nickname.

VINCE. *(Shouting.)* DANIEL is HOLDING. *(Vince picks up a line.)* Harris? Hi. Here’s Daniel. *(He connects the call.)* Daniel, you’re on with Harris. *(He puts the call on hold and takes off his headset. He speaks in a singingly passive-aggressive voice. To Nick.)* I can’t wait to leave you here to rot for all eternity!!

NICK. *(Normal voice.)* There’s something I’ve been meaning to ask you — *(Vince notices the “on hold” button flashing.)*

VINCE. Who's on three?

NICK. (*Gestures to his face.*) — is that a beard?

VINCE. What's on three?

NICK. Justin.

VINCE. The intern?

NICK. Yep.

VINCE. For how long?

NICK. Ten minutes.

VINCE. Crickets!

NICK. Five. Okay? Five minutes. I told him I had Daniel calling for him.

VINCE. So he's been shitting himself for ten minutes?

NICK. Five. Watch this. (*Nick picks up the line and puts it on speakerphone. We hear Justin's voice. In a higher voice.*) Justin?

JUSTIN. (*On speakerphone.*) Yeah?

NICK. We're just trying to get a hold of Daniel. He asked for you and then had to jump on another call. Hang in there, buddy.

JUSTIN. (*On speakerphone.*) Do you have any idea what this is about?

NICK. Something about the company-wide email you sent out about the mail-run being an hour late on Monday.

JUSTIN. (*On speakerphone.*) I only did that because Erin was out sick. It's not even my job. I'm sorry. Did it ... Was it wrong? Or something ... Sorry. (*Vince looks at the phone.*)

VINCE. (*To Nick.*) Daniel's off. Who's next on his phone-sheet?

NICK. James.

(*Winces, re: "Dammit."*) Get him.

JUSTIN. (*On speakerphone.*) Hello?

NICK. (*To Justin.*) Gotta jump.

VINCE. THREE him! (*Nick pushes the number "3" on his phone keypad. This produces a loud, piercing BEEEEEEEEEEEEEP!*)

JUSTIN. (*On speakerphone.*) Ugh! What was that? (*Nick hangs up. Nick and Vince put their headsets on. The phone rings. Vince answers. Nick dials.*)

VINCE. Daniel Weisinger's office.

NICK. Getting James.

VINCE. (*To Daniel.*) James called. At three-thirty. We're getting him now. You were in your appointment, Daniel. (*Vince snaps his fingers at Nick.*) Yep. Yep. You were in your — You told me not to.

NICK. Leaving word for James.

VINCE. *(To Daniel.)* We left word for James at the office. We're trying his cell.

VINCE. *(Leaves a message.)* Hey there. We have ... Daniel Weisinger calling for Mr. James. Please give us a call back at the office as soon as possible. Thank you. *(Nick ends his call. Dials.)* Trying James's cell.

VINCE. *(To Daniel.)* You made it very clear you didn't want to be interrupted. *(Vince mutes himself. To Nick.)* I will personally rape your mother if you don't get James on the phone, Nick. *(Vince un-mutes himself.)* Actually I will repeat what you said to me verbatim, Daniel. You said that if I interrupted you with a call that I could forget about being promoted and that I would actually be demoted. Demoted to the lowest common denominator which would be nothing. Nothing at the bottom of nowhere. *(Nick waves wildly at Vince.)*

NICK. Hello, Mr. James. We have Daniel calling for you.

VINCE. *(To Daniel.)* And we have James.

NICK. Just a moment. *(Nick puts his call on hold.)* James on two.

VINCE. I commit everything you say to memory, Daniel. That's what I will miss most about working in this office ... *(He listens to Daniel insult him.)* ... Yep. Yep. Here's James. *(He connects the call.)* Mr. James, you're on with Daniel. *(He puts the call on hold.)* Okaaaay ... *(Suddenly and with great violence, Vince stands, picks up the desk phone and goes to throw it.)*

NICK. New Girl needs that. *(Vince stops himself. He puts the phone down carefully. Then ...)*

VINCE. YOU SAD STUPID RICH FUCKHEAD! FUUCKKK YOUU!!! *(Vince sits down and types. Nick watches a video on YouTube.)*

NICK. Have you seen this video where a break-dancer accidentally kicks a baby?

VINCE. Hey, Nick —

NICK. That baby FEE-lies.

VINCE. By the time Daniel gets off this call, he'll be upstate. He'll sign off for the weekend. I'm gonna move the rest of my stuff into my new office.

ASSISTANCE

by Leslye Headland

3M, 3W

For these young assistants, life is an endless series of humiliations at the hands of their hellacious boss, a powerful uber-magnate. In rare moments of calm when the phone calls stop rolling, Nick and Nora and their traumatized co-workers question whether all their work will lead to success — or just more work. Leslye Headland's ASSISTANCE is a biting, high-octane satire about our attraction to power and what we're willing to sacrifice to stay in its orbit.

"... the theatrical equivalent of a triple-shot espresso, bristling with propulsive nerviness and high style ... ferociously funny."

—The Los Angeles Times

"Headland can unleash a rapid-fire comic blitzkrieg with a spot-on ear for the way 20-somethings relate to each other."

—The New York Post

"Leslye Headland's viciously funny ASSISTANCE aspires to be a Gen Y Glengarry with a sweeter finish and a place for women. Headland is a puckish weaver of sharp, pinging dialogue, a modern-day screwball patter."

—Time Out New York

Also by Leslye Headland
BACHELORETTE

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