



RASHEEDA SPEAKING

BY JOEL DRAKE JOHNSON



DRAMATISTS
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*For my husband,
Larry Bill Salzmänn*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Russ Tutterow, Mary Ann Thebus, Lisa Dillman, and Martha Lavey for their early support of the play.

Tara Mallen and Rivendell Theatre for producing the first production.

Chris Heckel-Oliver for her insights into the play and for suggesting the play's title.

Ian Morgan for his consistent faith in my work.

Scott Elliott for giving RASHEEDA SPEAKING a home in New York City.

Sandy Shinner and Cynthia Nixon, whose meticulous and insightful direction made the play even better.

J. Stephen Richards, James Horwath, Carlo Franco, Randy Orians, Jane and Paul Fish, Patrick Finnessy, Iakovos Mesaritos, Ray and Becky Johnson, Ann and Nate LeRette, Steff Woodworth, Maritha van der Walt, Larry Dyekman, Susan Gotfried, and Michael Marcincuk, whose interest in my work keeps me inspired.

My parents, Raymond and Henrietta (Burwell) Johnson, who taught me so much about tolerance and acceptance.

RASHEEDA SPEAKING received its world premiere at the Rivendell Theatre Ensemble (Tara Mallen, Artistic Director) in Chicago, Illinois, on January 18, 2013. It was directed by Sandy Shinner; the set design was by Megan Wilkerson; the costume design was by Samatha C. Jones; the lighting design was by Diane Fairchild; the original music and sound design were by Victoria Deiorio; and the production stage manager was Hannah Baker Bramsen. The cast was as follows:

DR. DAVID WILLIAMSEric Slater
ILEEN VAN METER..... Tara Mallen
JACLYN SPAULDING Ora Jones
ROSE SAUNDERS Lorraine Freund

The New York premiere of RASHEEDA SPEAKING opened on January 27, 2015 at the Pershing Square Signature Theatre Center and was produced by the The New Group (Scott Elliott, Artistic Director; Adam Bernstein, Executive Director). The play was directed by Cynthia Nixon; the set design was by Allen Moyer; the costume design was by Toni-Leslie James; the lighting design was by Jennifer Tipton; the original music and sound design were by David Van Tieghem; and the production stage manager was Valerie A. Peterson. The cast was as follows:

DR. DAVID WILLIAMS Darren Goldstein
ILEEN VAN METER.....Dianne Weist
JACLYN SPAULDING Tonya Pinkins
ROSE SAUNDERSPatricia Conolly

CHARACTERS

DR. DAVID WILLIAMS

ILEEN VAN METER

JACLYN SPAULDING

ROSE SAUNDERS

SET

All of the action takes place in the office/reception area and — very occasionally, but particularly at the end — the hallway that leads to the office. There may be a couple of brief moments when we “think” we see Jaclyn in the hallway.

DIALOGUE

The dash (—) at the end of dialogue means there is a slight overlap with the next line.

PACING

Each scene starts at the beginning of a work day. The time shifts between scenes should be swift and get faster as the play progresses, as if propelled by some unseen force.

RASHEEDA SPEAKING

A small office. Two desks. There is a counter where patients check in. There is a door to a restroom and a door that leads to the other side of the counter. A table in one of the corners is used for coffee, pastries, etc. There is a small refrigerator on the table. There are plants around the office and one on Jaclyn's desk. Dr. Williams and Ileen talk quietly, secretly, at the top of the scene.

ILEEN. You want to take a look at the patient list, Doctor?

WILLIAMS. In a minute. You know Jackie's coming back today.

ILEEN. Oh, good!

WILLIAMS. And I wanted to talk to you about that, about her return and wanted to do it before I do my rounds.

ILEEN. That's fine —

WILLIAMS. And before she shows up here.

ILEEN. Okay —

WILLIAMS. I've been concerned about her.

ILEEN. Have you?

WILLIAMS. Since she was hired —

ILEEN. Oh.

WILLIAMS. I don't think she fits in, I don't think her work is very good.

ILEEN. I think she does okay —

WILLIAMS. She seems unhappy.

ILEEN. That's true —

WILLIAMS. And that unhappiness rubs off on everyone around her.

ILEEN. I can sometimes get her out of that though. I kid around with her. I tease her. I try to get her to relax a little bit —

WILLIAMS. That's because you're a fantastic colleague.

ILEEN. Well, thank you.

WILLIAMS. You are. You're the best. And Jackie may be okay in her job —

ILEEN. She works pretty hard —
WILLIAMS. But her attitude is terrible. And she hates me —
ILEEN. I don't think she hates you —
WILLIAMS. She never looks me in the eye.
ILEEN. I think she's shy.
WILLIAMS. I don't think it's shyness.
ILEEN. I think it might be —
WILLIAMS. And how can I communicate with someone who doesn't look me in the eye? How can I trust that person? How can that person fit into the teamwork atmosphere that I want for this office — a teamwork atmosphere that is best for my patients? She represents this office, remember. And even worse, she represents me.
ILEEN. She can be abrupt —
WILLIAMS. Rude.
ILEEN. She does her job.
WILLIAMS. Rudely.
ILEEN. I think she's still very unsure of herself —
WILLIAMS. She's been here for six months.
ILEEN. There's a lot to learn.
WILLIAMS. And she's got a great teacher in you.
ILEEN. Thank you. I love my job.
WILLIAMS. And I love your work. And I know that Pam Edson on the fifth floor — do you know Pam?
ILEEN. I don't.
WILLIAMS. I know Pam Edson, this really great gal, is interested in working here with me, with you.
ILEEN. Oh?
WILLIAMS. I've told her about you — and so she knows how great you are.
ILEEN. Thank you —
WILLIAMS. A team-worker all the way.
ILEEN. That's good.
WILLIAMS. But I don't want to lose her — she's that good — and I know that I will if I don't act pretty quickly.
ILEEN. Oh. Well. So you're going to get rid of Jaclyn?
WILLIAMS. Or get her transferred if possible —
ILEEN. That would be so much better —
WILLIAMS. You are the nicest person —
ILEEN. Thanks —

WILLIAMS. BUT I've got to have stats, some facts about the way she works. You know how Human Resources can be. You've had some training.

ILEEN. A little.

WILLIAMS. Lots of demands.

ILEEN. Sometimes they're necessary —

WILLIAMS. And then sometimes they protect people who shouldn't be protected. But if I can't get some real data on Jackie, I'm not sure I can finagle some kind of turnover, you know, maybe get her back at her old job doing xeroxing —

ILEEN. She hated that job —

WILLIAMS. But I need you to do some observations —

ILEEN. Me?

WILLIAMS. Some careful observing of her work —

ILEEN. I don't know if I can do that —

WILLIAMS. Just make note of her behavior, say, with patients —

ILEEN. Is this why you promoted me to office manager?

WILLIAMS. No.

ILEEN. To get rid of Jaclyn?

WILLIAMS. Absolutely not. I need someone to oversee the office.

ILEEN. There's only two of us.

WILLIAMS. I need a manager who reports to me.

ILEEN. Oh.

WILLIAMS. At the time of the promotion, I was not thinking about Jackie. And I mean that. You've been my right-hand girl now for almost eight years, so why not give my right-hand girl a promotion and a raise, right? You're the best, Ileen, you've got to know that. The very best.

ILEEN. Thank you, Doctor.

WILLIAMS. And you believe me?

ILEEN. Of course.

WILLIAMS. I'd be lost without you. And this is one of those times I really need you to help me, help me in putting this office back to the way it used to be before I made the mistake of hiring Jackie. We miss Denise, don't we?

ILEEN. I loved Denise.

WILLIAMS. So it's time to find someone who can really take her place, okay?

ILEEN. I guess. Yes.

WILLIAMS. What I am about to tell you is confidential — strictly between you and me — but you know, Human Resources told me that Jackie is having anxiety attacks.

ILEEN. Jaclyn? I can't imagine —

WILLIAMS. Jackie's family doctor called and told them she's been home this week because she's suffering from anxiety. Something about toxins in the air.

ILEEN. She's talked about toxins —

WILLIAMS. But I told HR, listen, her anxiety attacks have nothing to do with toxins. It comes from her knowing that she doesn't belong in this office. She's not meant for this office. She doesn't have the social skills for it. Too angry, too mad at the world, and I made a mistake in hiring her, thinking I should do HR a favor and who now tell me that I have to have some kind of documentation —

ILEEN. From me?

WILLIAMS. From you to me. I don't want you spying for me but I do want to be able to rely on your good observations, objective observations, I mean.

ILEEN. I will keep my eyes open and observations objective.

WILLIAMS. Don't let her get away with anything. (*As he gives her a notebook.*) You notice it, you make note of it.

ILEEN. I will do that.

WILLIAMS. And I was hoping we could meet a little early every morning for the next week or so — preferably before she gets here — just to keep each other updated.

ILEEN. Updated?

WILLIAMS. Now that she's coming back, I gotta take some kind of a stand, Ileen. We have to take some kind of a stand. And there are all kinds of ramifications, you know what I mean?

ILEEN. I think I do —

WILLIAMS. It's hard to get rid of people today — with all the tricks that Human Resources can pull out of their hat and those superficial laws about harassment. And with all that resentment she has built up inside her, wow, there's going to be a lot of tricks pulled from that particular hat —

ILEEN. The race card, you mean?

WILLIAMS. You're not to say that.

ILEEN. Oh. Okay.

WILLIAMS. You understand?

ILEEN. I guess —

WILLIAMS. We don't go there, okay?
ILEEN. Yes.
WILLIAMS. That's not what I'm about.
ILEEN. And I know that.
WILLIAMS. Not that there isn't cause.
ILEEN. Cause?
WILLIAMS. Did I mention Pam Edson?
ILEEN. You did.
WILLIAMS. I think the three of us would make a great team and that's what it's all about, wouldn't you say?
ILEEN. I would. But what if Jaclyn changes? What if she gets better?
WILLIAMS. You think that's going to happen?
ILEEN. It might.
WILLIAMS. Come on. You really think so?
ILEEN. Well, she seems set —
ILEEN and WILLIAMS. — in her ways.
WILLIAMS. That's right. (*Confidentially.*) But you know, Ileen, I'm set in my ways, too. And part of that set includes wanting and needing to be comfortable in my own office, with a staff that likes me, that wants to be with me, work with me, hang in there with me and for me. I have patients who are in deep, deep trouble when they come here.
ILEEN. I understand —
WILLIAMS. And I don't need them subjected to the whims of Jackie, the prima donna. (*Ileen giggles.*) Right? Am I right?
ILEEN. She is but I think it's part of what I like about her.
WILLIAMS. And it is time to let that go.
ILEEN. Of course.
WILLIAMS. We're a team?
ILEEN. Yes.
WILLIAMS. And we're together on this?
ILEEN. We are.
WILLIAMS. Fantastic. So is this the patient list?
ILEEN. Oh, okay, yes, this is it.
WILLIAMS. (*As he looks.*) Any surprises here?
ILEEN. You're seeing Mrs. Saunders before you do your rounds —
A possible tumor near the pancreas —
WILLIAMS. I remember.
ILEEN. She has to rely on her son to get here and her son has to go to work —
WILLIAMS. Gotcha.

RASHEEDA SPEAKING

by Joel Drake Johnson

1M, 3W

This tense workplace thriller examines the realities of so-called “post-racial” when two co-workers — one black, the other white — are driven apart by the machinations of their boss. A chilling power struggle ensues that spins wildly out of control. RASHEEDA SPEAKING is an incisive and shocking dark comedy that keeps you in its claustrophobic grip until the final moment.

“RASHEEDA SPEAKING [is] an exquisitely tense and often cringingly funny portrait of racial paranoia ... Chilling. An incendiary play by Joel Drake Johnson.”

—**The New York Times**

“... the racially charged atmosphere thickens fast in RASHEEDA SPEAKING, an acidic depiction of race, power and friendship. Blending darkly awkward workplace comedy with intense racial tension, Johnson’s office-politics thriller is not afraid to push buttons hard.”

—**Time Out (New York)**

“A wild ride ... a wallop of a play ... a thrilling must-see play.”

—**New York Magazine**

“‘The doctor will see you now’ takes on a whole new meaning in [this] comedy-drama that’s jagged, jolting and just plain terrific.”

—**New York Daily News**

ISBN: 978-0-8222-3349-7



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