

THE BREAK OF NOON

BY NEIL LABUTE



DRAMATISTS
PLAY SERVICE
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THE BREAK OF NOON
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SPECIAL NOTE

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World Premiere presented by the Manhattan Class Company and the Geffen Playhouse
at the Lucille Lortel Theatre in New York, NY in October 2010
and at the Geffen Playhouse in January 2011.

Manhattan Class Company:

Artistic Directors: Robert LuPone & Bernard Telsey;

Associate Artistic Director: William Cantler; Executive Director: Blake West.

Geffen Playhouse:

Producing Director: Gil Cates; Artistic Director: Randall Arney;

Managing Director: Ken Novice.

THE BREAK OF NOON was presented at the Lucille Lortel Theater in New York City in a Manhattan Class Company coproduction with the Geffen Playhouse, opening in October 2010. It was directed by Jo Bonney; the set design was by Neil Patel; the costume design was by ESosa; the lighting design was by David Weiner; the sound design was by Darron L. West; the original music was by Justin Ellington; the special effects were by Matthew Holtzclaw; the dialect coach was Stephen Gabis; the wig design was by J. Jared Janas and Rob Greene; and the stage manager was Christina Lowe. The cast was as follows:

JENNY/GIGI Tracee Chimo
JOHN SMITH David Duchovny
LAWYER/DETECTIVE John Earl Jelks
GINGER/JESSE Amanda Peet

CHARACTERS

JENNY

GIGI

JOHN SMITH

LAWYER

DETECTIVE

GINGER

JESSE

A slash (/) indicates an overlap in lines between two actors.

THE BREAK OF NOON

Silence. Darkness.

A light snaps on. Harsh. Direct. It reveals a man seated on a chair. He squints out at us.

He takes a deep breath, nodding. Starts to speak. Stops. Another breath or two before he can begin.

MAN. The first shot that I heard — of course in the beginning I didn't know what it was but, yeah, now I know it was a gun — came when I was in the restroom washing my hands. I was doing that, *drying* them, actually, and I heard this “pop” sound from somewhere in the building. (*Beat.*) So, my thinking here is, and I'm just ... this is only speculation because I know you still have a lot of ... whad-dayacallit? *Forensic* work and all that, but I figure he came up on that noon elevator. Right? Now that sounds — there's no such thing as a “noon” elevator, those things are up and down all day long, but I'm saying that he must've planned it that way. Being on the one that arrived right when they're all waiting there to jump on for an hour break. Doesn't that seem...? I mean, look, the guy knows the layout, has a sense of the overall routine, I'm saying of the office routine, and therefore he shows up right at the busiest time of the day. I don't like to think about it, you know, as if *I* was him — that's creepy — but it's true. If you wanted to make the kind of, like, statement that he did, create panic and widespread *havoc* on a major scale, then you'd come into the place with your guns blazing as all these men and women are wandering around taking drink orders and not a thought in their heads other than maybe the, ahhh, *shrimp basket* over at that Irish pub that's ... (*He smiles and stops for a minute, looking out into the brightness. He squints again, shielding his eyes. Hesitating.*) ... sorry, that sun is really strong and it's shin-

ing right into my ... could you ... maybe...? (*The blinds are adjusted. By degrees. Finally the man smiles and nods that he can continue.*) Thanks a lot. Thank you for ... it's much better that way. (*He fidgets in his chair for a moment, trying to get a bit more comfortable. He does and turns back out to speak.*) I know the shots started happening more quickly after the first one — he was using a machine gun — some of the police guys who got to me said that. That's what they said. An AK-47 or whatever those things are known as ... Russian? Right? Plus handguns and some knives, even. Someone said he stabbed a few — one of my assistants ... this nice girl from Florida, only moved here about *eight* months ago with her two kids. Name was Suzie. He, ahhhh ... he cut Suzie's throat in the copy room, where he found her down on the floor. Trying to pretend she was dead. (*Laughs.*) Why would she do that? I mean, I guess you do all kinda shit when your life's ... and she was just what? Guessing. Right? I mean, with all that's going on, she doesn't know how many guys are doing this, if it's, like, a *gang* or something. So she goes down on the tile there, see, so she can pretend like she's already been shot or whatnot, I mean, I might've done the very same thing. Problem is — thing she couldn't know — there's only one man. He comes to the Xerox area there, sees her playing possum and knows *he* didn't kill her ... and then stops, in the middle of this, you know, rampage, to do that. That's what he did. He goes and he slits her throat and then he — he took the time to do that. To her. (*Beat.*) I'm sorry but that is just sorta off-the-goddamn-charts from what I know about human behavior. It really is. That is the kinda shit you read on, like, the internet or — (*The man stops for a moment, fighting back tears. He turns away and then looks back. Shaking his head.*) No, no ... it's OK ... I'm fine. So there was this ... this beat of just pure ... panic inside me. One *moment* where I'm thinking — because now I get it — I can feel what's going on and I wanna tell you, it was not like a movie in there. It wasn't. Like, when you're a kid and you see something on TV or at the drive-in and think, "I could get out of that! I'd find a way through the fire or the, like, *natives* or Nazis or what-ever." A bunch of bank robbers. But you don't. Most people get shot or crushed by concrete or have a heart attack or something. We get ripped apart by *sharks* or end up on that wrong plane or, or, or on the Israeli *Olympic* team ... And that's it. (*Beat.*) I thought my life was ... I. I'm sorry. (*He takes a moment to gather his thoughts. Not*

wanting to go back to that place.) ... this is hard. It's really ... just ... yeah. Hard. (Beat.) I knew that's how I was gonna end up — some *statistic* — if I didn't do something. Make a move or get myself outta there. I scrambled outta the bathroom and kept my head down, moving off between the first set of those — what're they called? — the room dividers that I come to down the corridor, figuring I could make it to an exit or something, use the stairs, before I'd be spotted. There's this eerie sort of silence in the air now — I suppose the initial chaos had subsided and ... I think we were all just trying to survive from then on. Find some corner to crawl into, get out a door or *anything*. See, we're too high up to jump — it's seven floors down — but if you are trapped like that you'll do whatever to try and live, it's true. Leap, even. Leap onto rocks or into a burning pit of like, like, fucking *cobras* ... because we think there might be a chance! (Beat.) So there I go — I'm down on my hands and knees practically, trying to figure out which side of the room he's headed to. As I move along I pass these openings into other people's offices ... you know, like, the mini-offices for the sales people or junior execs who sit right out in the middle of the floor with their little ... plants and crap, pictures of their kids out for all of us to see — and then, every so often. Bam! Bam-bam! That sound of his gun. Firing. Bam! It was ... bam! You know? (The man rubs a hand across his face, trying to wipe away some of the memories.) I see folks I haven't talked to in *weeks* — you work in the same company but you just don't have time to stand around and be so funny with everyone you meet, know what I mean? I can't even remember some of their first names! But I see them there, a few of 'em, anyway, as I'm sneaking along. Grown men, hunched up under their desks weeping into their cell phones, calling the police or their wives — *anybody* — trying to figure out what to do next. How to ... or dead. Most of 'em were already dead ... I saw Marjorie, one of the, ahh, older ladies from "Word Processing" over on the floor — she'd been hit in the back or something — I'm not all that sure — and she had pulled herself down the hall toward the break room. I don't think she ever even saw what hit her ... I really don't. Blood pouring down the back of her blouse and, and, and my — this salesman who ... he stops in about once a *month* — Yeah! How's that for luck? — with most of his face blown off. Anyway, he was dead, too. (Beat.) And then I saw him. The gunman. He had turned this corner about thirty yards down

THE BREAK OF NOON

by Neil LaBute

2M, 2W (doubling)

Amidst the chaos and horror of the worst office shooting in American history, John Smith sees the face of God. His modern-day revelation creates a maelstrom of disbelief among everyone he knows. A newcomer to faith, John urgently searches for a modern response to the age-old question: at what cost salvation?

"Unsettles exactly as it should ... A nifty coup de théâtre that demands that you rethink everything you've seen up to that point." —**The New York Times**

"A darkly comic morality tale." —**The New York Post**

"Neil LaBute has done something quite different in this new play: He's created what basically amounts to a Rorschach test of faith." —**Associated Press**

"Molière's Tartuffe, a world classic, [is] also based on a transparently obnoxious oaf who parks himself in his gullible friend's home, against the redundant and increasingly desperate advice of the host's family, before trying to marry his host's daughter while seducing his wife ... Through all of this, Tartuffe claims to be a humble representative of God, while preaching the gospel of his personal salvation — much like LaBute's protagonist ... LaBute, like Molière, is a national class clown, a satirist hurling barbs at sundry hypocrisies, and our inability to know the truth, let alone to tell it ... LaBute is not Molière reincarnated, but their plays share a proclivity for cruelty and for trying to fathom why and how people lie — not only to each other, but to themselves." —**L.A. Weekly**

Also by Neil LaBute

REASONS TO BE PRETTY

ISBN 978-0-8222-2534-8



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