

Nothing Like You Said

By: Montana Ludlow

Production notes: While this show deals with very sensitive and traumatic themes, it is never stated outright, and should be directed and performed accordingly. There are many in the world who know exactly as Will feels, and in turn how Harper feels. Their experiences are not new or foreign, and should be dealt with in a respectful and kind manner. It is not specified why Will is as distraught as they are, and what exactly put them in the hospital, and I suggest that performers find what feels most true to them, and their interpretation of the character.

A note on casting, while most of the characters are written with binary pronouns, this should not be the main consideration when casting.

Scene 1

(Split stage, on stage right a desk/chair and an armchair. Desk is covered with papers, some crumpled, some stacked. General disarray and trash everywhere. WILL sits at desk, EMILY sits in an armchair with a large stack of papers and is reading them. Both frozen and no light is on them at rise. Stage left- at rise ANTHONY is walking away from HARPER, very agitated. HARPER follows clearly frustrated but placating)

Anthony: Why can't you just get this through your thick skull?

Harper: What are you talking about?

A: It's like everything I say goes in one ear and out the other.

H: I'm right here! I'm listening! I just don't understand.

A: You never understand.

H: I want to understand! I am trying to understand! But every time I ask questions you act like it's a personal attack on your very essence.

A: Maybe I've just lost who I am in all this. My true self.

H: What do you mean "all this". **beat** Do you mean me? In us?

A: Yeah.

H: Well, you know what. Don't let me keep you from your "true self".

(HARPER leaves ANTHONY and lights fade on stage right. Lights up stage left and EMILY and WILL unfreeze as EMILY begins rifling through the stack of papers in her lap)

Emily: I thought this was a love story. Why are they breaking up in the first chapter?

Will: I handed you the first draft of that chapter! Not the whole book.

E: This is the first draft of a single chapter??

W: Well, and the second draft. And the third draft. And the fourth and the-

E: Alright okay I got it. Why are there so many drafts of the same chapter?

W: I want this to be the set up for the reunion! It needs to be cutting and brutal and make the reader NEED them to be together.

E: So, it needs to be a resolvable argument.

W: Yes! And frustrating enough that they don't rekindle right away. Gotta let it simmer a bit.

E: Right so you can inflict trauma on the characters.

W: Because there's no character.

W/E: More relatable than a broken character.

E: If you're trying to make this break up to end all breakups you gotta rewrite it. That was the most generic boring breakup I have ever read. Where's the fire? The passion?

W: Go to the fourth draft!!

(EMILY shuffles to farther in the stack of papers, she and WILL walk to join ANTHONY and HARPER on stage right where they have reset for the beginning of their scene)

E: Anthony walks away from Harper, in Full Agitation. His hands raking through his hair as he exclaims-

W/A: Why can't you get this through your thick skull?!

E: Harper, who had been following behind Anthony is taken aback at this exclamation.

H: What are you talking about?

E: Anthony continues to exclaim, each point accentuated by a further emphatic gesture.

A: It's like everything I say is going in one ear and out the other!

E: Anthony turns away from Harper, but she rushes to his side and grabs him so that he turns to face her while she emphatically insists-

H: I'm right here! I'm listening! I just don't understand!

E: Anthony retorts-

W: In agony

E: ...in agony, removing her hands from him.

A: You never understand.

(ANTHONY and HARPER freeze while EMILY shuffles papers, WILL has been fully enraptured by their own work for the entire time and does not notice that the scene has stopped until EMILY speaks)

E: I don't know...something seems to be missing.

W: Well if you'd like, draft five is the same thing only Anthony is Russian. Oh! And I hadn't yet settled on a location yet but I was thinking someplace unconventional, like while Harper is at work.

E: Where does Harper work?

W: Well in draft eleven she's a server at a pirate themed dinner theater, so she'd be in full costume. But I wonder if the parrot would be too much?

(While WILL has been speaking, they have been running around adding different costume pieces/set pieces/ props to the scene that is still frozen in front of them but at the end of this line about the parrot the scene resumes)

H: I'm right here! I'm listening! I just don't understand!

Parrot:(voiced either by HARPER or a stagehand) *squawk* Don't understand.

A: *heavy accent* You never understand.

*(Both freeze again, lights go dark stage right so that **EMILY** and **WILL** can take their conversation stage left while scene changes)*

E: Well now there's way too much going on.

W: I am willing to negotiate on the parrot.

E: no, that's not the only problem. I mean yeah definitely get rid of the parrot, but there's more to it than that. I mean, location alone-

W: Draft seventeen! In this version they're both southern and they're at a-

E: *(flipping ahead to draft twenty-three and reads aloud)* Football game??

*(Lights up stage right to reveal that there are now several seats in a row, both **ANTHONY** and **HARPER** are decked out in sports gear(think foam fingers, popcorn etc). **EMILY** and **WILL** join the couple by sitting on either side of them to watch the breakup. Sound cue: football crowd noise. Both **ANTHONY** and **HARPER** have to shout to be heard for this next couple of lines)*

A: Why can't you just get this through your thick skull??

H:*(has been watching and enjoying the game does not realize at first what **ANTHONY** is talking about)* what are you talking about?

*(All four actors then do "the wave" to be more involved with the unseen football crowd, as they sit down **EMILY** leans to **WILL** over the couple.)*

E: Immediate no.

W: Well what about draft twenty-three?

*(All of the props/set from the previous draft are cleared away quickly, we hear the intro to a jazzy song, previous breakup dialogue is ad libbed over the upbeat music. **WILL** is center of the dancing and singing, just having a great time. **ANTHONY** and **HARPER** will deliver a line and then smile like nothing is wrong towards the audience. Number is over the top, includes kickline, tapping, the whole shebang. **EMILY** calls the number short, **ANTHONY** and **HARPER** exit, but **WILL** continues dancing. Stage right darkens for the remainder of this scene)*

E: Will, Will, WILL! (**WILL** stops, finally back in the real world) How in the world are your readers going to read a musical??

W: I was wondering how we'd feel about a stage adaptation.

E: Will!

W: I also have an option for a space voyage.

E: Will, you need to think long and hard about what you're even trying to say here. All these extra variations are distractions and you know it! Why are you having such a hard time with this book? I know its been a little difficult since-

W: Don't.

E: Look. I know its been a lot. But you were so excited about this book when you pitched it to me. You need to remember why you were so excited. Reconnect with the characters and find the sincerity that you're missing right now. Call or text me if you need anything.

(EMILY exits, WILL sits down at their desk slowly and starts to look through some of the papers stacked there).

W: Of course, I'm not excited about it anymore, I'm not the same person who pitched that book. That person was excited about everything, they were so carefree and they hadn't even yet met-

(On this last line, WILL looks forward and up as lights come up on stage right to reveal ANTHONY. Both smile at each other and then WILL shakes their head and as they look away, the lights on ANTHONY dim)

W: It doesn't matter. He doesn't matter. Not anymore. Okay okay. Don't start with the breakup, start with...the reunion! The resolve. The happy. Be happy. *(starts to write)*

(lights up stage right, we see HARPER holding a baby, she knocks on a door, ANTHONY answers)

A: Harper! Is that?

H: Yes Anthony, this is your s-

W: Nope *(stage right lights down. crumples up the sheet they were writing on and throws it over their shoulder, adding to the debris on the floor)* why would she be pregnant that's a dumb cop out. Uhhh what about *(begins to write again)*

(Lights up stage right, stage is set like a coffee house. HARPER is sitting, ANTHONY enters, HARPER stands and they both stare at each other as if frozen by the other's very presence)

H: I didn't know if you wanted to see me again.

A: I've wanted to see you every day since-

(WILL has now left their desk and is standing between ANTHONY and HARPER looking back and forth during this moment of tension)

W: No, he should be waiting for her. *(runs back to the desk and writes something as characters switch positions and lights rise again)*

A: I didn't know if you wanted to see me again.

H: I've wanted to see you every day since I walked away.

(WILL has slowly migrated back onto stage right and is once again staring at the two and their moment of tension)

W: Okay yeah, that feels right. That's good. But she's changed so much and he's changed- not at all.

(ANTHONY breaks his frozen moment to speak directly to WILL)

A: Do I need to be different?

W: *(taken aback)* what?

A: Do you want me to change?

W: No! No, you're- you're perfect! You shouldn't change at all you're-(*they awkwardly stumbles during this exchange and turns they're back on ANTHONY*)

(*as WILL is speaking, the scene changes with lights to let us know it's a different day. ANTHONY now wears an apron and holds a waiter book. WILL turns back around.*)

A: Hi, I'm Andrew.

W: hi! I'm Will.

A: Hey Will, now that we're friends, I have to tell you something.

W: Okay?

A: This is pretty personal so prepare yourself. (*Beat*) Your fly is down.

W: Oh shit, thanks.

A: No worries, now what can I do for you today Will?

W: Can I just get a vanilla iced coffee with some caramel drizzle?

A: Iced coffee? In this economy? Right away.

(*ANDREW starts to make coffee, and keeps looking back at WILL who is completely oblivious and is writing something down in a well worn journal. ANDREW turns around and hands WILL a cup, WILL pays and starts to collect their things*)

A: Uhh I hope this isn't too forward, but could I possibly get your number?

W: Andrew, frankly I am offended. We are close personal friends, shame on you for not already having my number. (*they grab a napkin and write it down before turning to leave*)

A: Will?

W: Yes, Andrew?

A: Sorry, I just wanted to hear you say my name again.

(*WILL has walked to the center of the stage and is smiling softly in remembrance of such a sweet moment when they hear knocking at the door. awoken from their dream walks quickly to the door and opens to reveal HANNAH*)

Hannah: Hey Will, I just wanted to stop by and check on you. I also brought a lasagna, oh Will it's a mess in here!

(*HANNAH has entered and given WILL a covered pan and while she is talking has already began picking up*)

W: You know you can stop bringing me these, I am technically better now. I even met with my publisher today. And can you please for the love of all that is good stop cleaning! I'll get around to it. Eventually.

H: Mm yes well technically better should mean eating and showering and I am going to assume by how you look and smell that neither has happened recently. And besides, what are sisters for?

W: Yeah yeah I know. And I appreciate you, but I do have to get back to work.

H: Ooh yes how's the new book coming! *(hurries over to the desk and starts shuffling through papers)*

W: *(hurriedly grabbing papers that Hannah is holding)* not good, which is why I need to work on it.

H: Let me read something!

W: I'd rather you not.

H: Anything! Please! Your forward, your afterword, the acknowledgments where you tell the whole world that you wouldn't have been able to pen a single word without your darling younger sister to feed you and to help you every step of the way.

W: Hannah please I really don't-

H: Come onnnnn, it'll be payment for the lasagna.

W: Fine.

(HANNAH excitedly grabs the paper handed back to her and settles into the armchair by the desk and reads quickly while WILL watches timidly from the desk. As HANNAH reads, her smile gets smaller and smaller as the words hit her, until finally she looks up at WILL)

H: Will, is this about-?

W: Yeah. Uh now I would appreciate some privacy so I can keep working.

(WILL has taken back the paper so HANNAH gets up awkwardly from her seat and gathers her things and heads to the door, but not before stopping and giving WILL a loving, if brief, hug)

H: Alright well, I love you. Call me if you need anything. *(She leaves.)*

(WILL takes a look at the paper that HANNAH was just reading and begins to read out loud, as they do so, lights come up on stage right where we see a heartbroken HARPER. As WILL reads aloud, HARPER joins until WILL is not heard and the lights fade on stage left, leaving HARPER to tell the story.)

W/H: I know that what happened to me isn't the worst thing in the world, and I know that what other people go through is far more traumatic than my story, but for me, this singular moment changed how I would function for the rest of my life.

I had heard, in more than one instance, how older people would always describe the younger generation as "thinking they were invincible". I had always set myself in a different category, given some distance between that group at large, because I knew I wasn't invincible, and that actions had consequences, and that life, is not infinite. But on some level, some deep, unthinking level, I felt invincible. I could drive fast, climb mountains, make mistakes, fall, and I wouldn't get hurt.

But that day, it changed. I've always been a cautious person, triple checking safety measures and being aware of the dangers around me. But now? The caution has turned into a level of fear that I hoped wouldn't reach me for several years, if ever. I'm constantly on the lookout, I'm slower when I make decisions, and the steps I take are with more purpose. For many reasons this is probably a good thing.

But I miss her. I miss being that person that wasn't constantly worried about things beyond her control. I miss being able to be mostly carefree about choices I make, like "eh, future me will worry about that if it

becomes a problem". I miss being not broken, I miss being whole, I miss who I was when I thought I was invincible.

(fade to black, fade in to blue)

(ANTHONY and HARPER are laying on a blanket, looking up at the stars, they lay on the stage with their heads almost touching so that they can both look at the same things at the same time. HARPER has her hand pointed towards the sky and she is clearly in the middle of a lengthy tirade about constellations, though ANTHONY is fully enjoying it.)

H: Obviously everyone knows the Dippers and Orion's belt yadda yadda yadda, but one of my favorite constellations is Lyra, the harp.

A: There's a star harp in the sky?

H: Absolutely there is, the gods put it there after the death of Orpheus.

A: Wasn't that the guy that like, played for Hades so that he would win back his dead lover?

H: I mean, basically. But the deal was he had to walk out of the Underworld without looking back to see if Euridice-

A: The girlfriend.

H: Yes, the girlfriend, was following. And he almost made it too.

A: *(sits up very distraught at this)* Almost?!

H: *(also sits up and faces ANTHONY)* just before he exited the Underworld, he was so excited that he had made it and they could be reunited that he turned around-

A: *(very invested in the story)* No!

H: Just in time to see Euridice, and watch her disappear back to the Underworld.

A: Did he ever get to see her again?

H: No, I don't think so, I think they were separate in the Underworld when Orpheus eventually died.

A: That's horrible. To lose someone you love after you've worked so hard to be with them.

(ANTHONY lays his head in Harper's lap and they continue to look at the stars. Lights up to reveal WILL, who is either sitting directly behind the couple in the armchair or at the desk on stage left, watching the couple. They are worse for wear, gaunt, with free-flowing tears streaming down their face)

H/W: Sometimes love is sad.

A: *(sits up so that he can look Harper directly in the face)* Love should never be sad!

H: Well, sometimes it's not in our control.

W: *(quietly, heartbroken)* Well then, I'm glad I met you.

A: Well then, I'm glad I met you.

H: Why do you say that?

W: Because I have a feeling, you'll never make me sad.

A: Because I have a feeling, you'll never make me sad.

(ANTHONY returns his head to HARPER'S lap on this line, and HARPER is very quietly pleased but maintains composure as she ruffles her hands through his hair.)

H: That's some high praise.

A: I think of it more as an accurate observation.

(They have a tender moment and then softly kiss. WILL is still watching, when suddenly the phone rings)

W:*(Startled but answers)* Hello?

(Lights on EMILY who is separate from the scene previous)

E: Hey! Just wanted to give you a quick call and check in with you. The draft that you sent me this morning had some great stuff in it.

W: Oh good! I'm glad you liked it.

E: My only note is a question, really.

W: Okay go ahead.

E: Where the hell is the rest of the draft Will?

W: I-

E: No. You don't get to speak right now, it's my turn. You told me that you would have the entire draft to me a WEEK ago. Instead, you send me some unfinished rough draft and expect that to be, okay?

W: I was ironing out some final details-

E: Will I know that this year has been hard for you, I get that, and I get that this book might not be the easiest thing in the world to write right now. But you signed a contract, there are deadlines to meet, and you are not meeting them. I need a manuscript as soon as possible or we will have to discuss what next steps to take. I'll be stopping in Thursday to pick up my copy.

W: Sure thing, Emily. It'll be ready.

E: I'm sorry Will, I really am. See you Thursday.

(After EMILY hangs up, WILL continues to hold the phone to their ear staring into space for a moment before turning back to the frozen scene in front of them, and goes to write something. Nothing seems to come to mind and in frustration they get up from their position and walk away from the couple. They set the writing utensils on the desk and begin pacing. Stage right goes dark when WILL leaves(either physically or mentally from the scene), but when they pick up another sheet of paper on the desk and begin to read it, stage left dims and stage right lights up to reveal ANTHONY.)

A: I had a moment the other day when I was sitting in the park, where I was listening to the kids play at the playground, and the sound of the gentle breeze as it whooshed through the trees and felt the warm sun on my face. I kept thinking; about how beautiful it all was, how everything around me had some

small significance and beauty. I could see imperfections all around me, like sure, the grass was more weeds than grass, and the kids at the park would sometimes be crying, and I was sitting on a park bench that had more bird poop on it than I think I'd ever seen in my life, but all these imperfections made this park, this day, this moment so inexplicably, perfect that I couldn't begin to take it all in or comprehend it. Then you called me, and the moment almost became the exact correct amount of perfect. The only thing missing was you at my side, to get excited about every dog you saw, to find ladybugs that just needed "a moment to rest", and to add to the joy and wonder that is every day on this planet with you in my life. Then it would have been just the right amount of perfect. Just like you.

*(Towards the end of this speech, **WILL** has joined **ANTHONY** on stage right so that the last couple of lines are delivered directly to **WILL**. At the end of the speech, **ANTHONY** leaves and **WILL** is left staring into the space that he left while lights up on stage left and **EMILY** enters behind **WILL**.)*

E: Your door was unlocked again; do you have a death wish?

W: *(awoken from the spell of the memory)* Oh hey, I thought you weren't coming until Thursday?

E: I was going to, but I got busy.

W: What?

E: Will, it's Friday.

W: Oh, oh! Right.

E: Do you have a draft I can read? *(Picks up a stack of papers)*

W: Wait that's not the

E: *(holds up a finer as they began to read, flipping through pages to read snippets)* Will-this is incredible. Where was all this six months ago??

W: In a hospital bed.

(They share a moment of understanding)

E:*(gently)* well, it's here now. Have you worked out that breakup scene yet? Or do I need to find you a choreographer instead?

W: I've been trying to but I'm not certain how it reads. *(They hand **EMILY** a stack of papers)* And if you don't like that version, I do still have some of the other previous drafts if you'd like to-

E: Ha, no thanks. I don't think I'd like to read a version where they're marooned on an island.

W:*(Hadn't thought about this option and considers it before moving on.)* Right fair okay. *(Hands **EMILY** a small stack of papers.)*

*(As **EMILY** begins to read, lights once again come on stage right to reveal our couple clearly in the throws of a long and heavy fight)*

H: I don't understand why you can't just get this!

A: What is there for me to get? Huh? That you blame all your problems on me?

H: I didn't say that!

A: You basically did! You said that what I was doing was a problem right? And how I expressed myself hurt you?

H: I didn't!

A: Well you know what Harper, you saying all of this hurts me! You're the one that did this! You're the one that made this whole thing a giant mess and it's because of you that we have so many problems. Every time that you hang out with that stupid sister of yours-

H: She is not stupid!

A: You come back with these crazy ideas in your head! Like how I'm this horrible guy and a horrible person and I treat you terribly. Guess what babe? I'M one of the good guys! This is what a good guy gets you nowadays and if that's not enough for you, maybe you should just try and be single again. That was so much fun before, right? Only this time you'll be going to some new guy as some old, broken slut with baggage and no one will want you. I am the only person who will ever want you.

*(During this tirade, **ANTHONY** has been belittling **HARPER** in both word and action until he towers over her, and it is clear to the audience that this is not the first time that this argument has occurred, nor is this the only type of abuse that **ANTHONY** has inflicted. **WILL** has been watching from stage left and at the height of this explosion they rush forward and place themselves between **HARPER** and **ANTHONY**.)*

W: STOP. *(All are surprised)* That is not true. Everything you are saying is a lie. I am not any of the things that you said about me. I am not old, I am not a slut, and I never hurt you. Not in the way that you hurt me. You like to pretend that because you were kind to me when you were happy and you apologized when you were done being mad that that made you some kind of good person, a good partner. Well, it doesn't. People who love you don't use you the way that you used me, and they don't act like this when their partner asks for them to do better. But you know what? I am better than this. I am better than you. And despite how hard you have tried to make it otherwise-I am not broken.

BLACKOUT