

Boundaries

A play in one act and four scenes

Written by:

Abhimanyu Acharya

Email: acharyaabhimanyu79@gmail.com

First performed at 'Purple shorts theatre festival' at The Wave, University of Western Ontario, February 2019.

Published in 'Hakara Bilingual'.

<https://www.hakara.in/abhimanyu-acharya/>

Setting

Anytime.Anywhere.

Stage

Ideal for a Black-box theatre. The performance space needs to be very claustrophobic and narrow. It needs to be so narrow that no two actors can comfortably sleep in that space at the same time. It is best if that space is created by using lights.

Characters

A.

B.

Both the characters are ageless, nameless, genderless, timeless. Anybody from anywhere can play them.

Set

No furniture is required. The stage is empty as far as furniture is concerned.

Properties

A rope.A bag with notebooks and pen.Screwdriver. Two clocks- One that works, and one that does not.

Delivery

Italics is used for stressed words. Punctuation follows delivery pattern and not the rules of grammar.

Scene-1

(The performance space is a small, narrow, claustrophobic space. It is empty initially, when the music is on. Music fades away, and enters A.

A is fixing a clock. The time has stopped. An old modernist theatre cliché. A does a number of things with it—opens it with a screwdriver, joins it back, pats it gently, taps it, looks at it holding it above his head and so on. A does not know that B has entered and is watching him, noting things in his notebook).

B: It's gone.

(A is startled. When did B appear? A gives him a look, and again gets back to fixing it).

B: I am telling you.

A: I heard. Thank you.

B: I can help.

A: You said it's gone.

B: Yes, it is. I can help you get over it.

A: I don't drink.

B: What if I gift you my own?

A: Why would you do that?

B: To help you.

A: I don't remember asking for your help.

B: I know. I was just being...nice.

(Beat.

B comes and sits near him.)

A: What?

B: What?

A: Why are you here?

B: What? Wait...why are *you* here?

A: I was just here. Always.

B: Okay.

(Beat).

A: You still haven't answered my question.

B: I am an explorer.

A: What do you explore?

B: Everything. Every new thing is a discovery for me.

A: Is that why you carry around that notebook?

B: Yes. It has details of my discoveries.

(Beat. A does not show much interest. He goes back to fixing the clock.)

B: You hold onto things.

A: I don't give up.

B: But it's gone.

A: Nothing is gone. It's part of my tradition.

B: Is it? Tell me more about your tradition.

(B is curiously listening, ready with his pen and notebook.)

A: Why?

B: I want to know. A tradition that teaches one to look back instead of looking ahead.

A: I never said that it teaches that.

B: Yes. I am only reading the subtext.

A: What? What are you talking about?

B: Tradition.

A: You are getting on my nerves.

B: (notes in his book) Short-tempered and easily irritated.

A: Wait! What is that?

B: I am making notes.

A: About?

B: Your kind.

A: Why?

(B keeps writing. A tries to ignore him, but is visibly bothered. B settles down. Looks at the audience, as if looking at the sun.)

A: So how long are you staying here?

B: I don't know. I kind of like it here.

A: You are going to *stay* here?

B: I said I don't know. I will see.

(B settles down. Stretches his leg. The space is so narrow, his leg touch A.)

A: You are bothering me.

B: Oh, I am sorry. Was just stretching. Didn't realize you were in my way.

A: What's your problem?

B: Nothing. Why are you getting all worked up? Do your work. Fix your thing.

(B lies down. A looks at him. Then, gets back to fixing the clock.)

B: But it's gone.

(A shoots an angry look at him.)

B: Just saying.

(B tries to sleep. A goes and gets a rope. B wakes up, and sees that A is doing something with it).

B: What are you upto?

A: I am creating boundaries.

B: What for?

A: To maintain distance.

B: And what good will that do?

A: Help me breathe.

B: Come on.

A: I need to do this.

B: Okay, wait a minute.

(B takes out his notebook. Starts writing while A is measuring the space to draw boundaries.)

A: What now?

B: What?

A: What did you write?

B: Oh, just something about you.

A: What?

B: Do you want me to read it out?

A: (reluctantly) Yes.

B: (reads out) "Believes in keeping distance. Doesn't mingle much. Loner. Scared. Insecure."

A: What the hell! Why would you write such things about me?

B: I write what I see.

A: It's just your opinion. There's no truth to it.

B: There is.

A: Drawing a boundary doesn't make me...anything.

B: It does. You don't know yourself, because you can never get an objective view of yourself.

(Beat. B keeps writing.)

A: But no one has ever said that to me.

B: Because no one saw you objectively before me. I am the first.

A: You are wrong.

B: You can believe that if that makes you sleep.

(B laughs patronizingly and makes one more note in his book. A is again irritated. He draws the boundary in such a way that he gets the bigger space.)

A: The boundaries are drawn. Now, this is your part. This is mine. Make sure you do not intervene in my space.

B: Okay. But you need not be scared.

(A gives him a look.)

B: Just saying.

(Beat.)

B: Do you think it works?

A: What?

B: Boundaries.

A: I hope.

B: What's the point?

A: It gives me my own space.

B: *Your* space.

A: Yes.

B: It's messed up.

A: What?

B: Your ideas. Of space. Ownership.

A: I don't care.

B: You can do better than that.

A: Why am I even listening to you?

B: I don't know. You need not.

(Beat.)

B: Did you manage to fix it?

A: Not yet.

B: May be it's time.

A: It *is* time.

B: What are you gonna do now?

A: Try.

B: Good.

(B writes something.)

A: You know what? It's irritating.

B: What?

A: This. The thing you are doing. *Exploring.*

B: It's what I do. It's who I am.

A: Change.

B: I cannot.

A: Why not?

B: This is all I know.

A: Intervening.

B: Exploring.

A: Same thing.

B: You know...whatever...if it makes you sleep.

A: I can't. Since you.

B: Why?

A: I don't get enough...enough space.

B: But now you should.

A: Why?

B: You are the one who drew boundaries.

A: Yes. But there was no need until you arrived.

B: There is no need even now.

A: I don't know what space is mine anymore.

B: No one knows that anyway.

A: Do you?

B: Not really.

(Beat. A gets back to fixing the clock. This time, furiously.)

B: It's arbitrary. The boundaries.

A: What does that mean?

B: There's no logic behind it.

A: There is.

B: Yeah, superficially. But there is no deeper logic or significance.

A: Deeper?

B: Yes.

A: What is the deeper logic?

B: You know. The one that lasts. That makes sense.

A: I can't sleep anymore.

B: Why?

(A shows the clock.)

A: Because of this.

B: Your body tells you time. Not that machine.

A: My body.

B: Our bodies.

A: Uh...how?

B: Observe it. It goes in cycles. Only when you ditch clocks can you truly understand time.

A: Is that one of your “discoveries”?

B: Yes. Clocks limit us.

(Beat.)

B: Like boundaries.

A: It's convenient.

B: It's stupid.

A: It's efficient.

B: It's limiting.

A: It's safe.

B: It breeds war.

A: Depends on you.

(Beat.)

A: *(All this time, he has been trying to fix the clock, but is now frustrated, and is about to throw it)* Fuck this.

B: Don't.

A: Why?

B: Keep your failures.

A: Why?

B: Keep them safe. It helps.

A: How?

B: Failure always gains greater significance when you succeed.

A: If I succeed.

B: If you succeed.

A: Will I?

B: Depends.

A: On?

B: On boundaries.

A: On boundaries?

B: Yes. You may succeed if the boundaries are drawn in your favour.

A: How do I know if they are?

B: You just know. Everyone knows. Boundaries reveal themselves easily. They are very explicit.

(B touches the rope. Drags it towards himself.)

A: Wait. What are you doing?

B: Shifting.

A: And?

B: Just that. Shifting.

A: Don't.

(Beat. A takes away the rope and arranged it the way it was earlier.)

A: I don't know what to do anymore.

B: Because you gave up?

A: Yes.

B: Is that why you kept going for so long? To kill time?

A: Not exactly.

B: What will you do now?

A: I don't know. I wonder if I can do anything.

B: You can tell me about yourself.

A: What does it do for me? I am not an explorer.

B: You are the subject.

A: I don't want to be.

B: You don't get to decide that.

A: I don't.

B: No.

A: I guess.

B: That's how it is. The system.

A: What is the system?

B: It governs everything. It governs us all.

A: Does it?

B: Yes.

A: How do you know?

B: (shows his notebook) I know.

A: Because of that.

B: Yes. My explorations. Yes.

A: Is that how you know things?

B: Yes.

A: About boundaries?

B: Yes.

A: Okay.

(A is in deep reflection, as if he realized something.)

Scene-2

(Both A and B are sleeping. There is not enough space, and B is toppling over A, his leg on B's leg. A wakes up, irritated. Puts B's leg away from his own territory. B wakes up).

B: What the hell?

A: Exactly.

B: What's wrong?

A: You broke the pact. You said you will not cross the boundary.

B: The pact?

A: Yes.

B: There was no pact.

A: There was. We decided.

B: You decided. I just agreed.

A: Yes. Same thing.

B: I was sleeping.

A: So was I.

B: It's unfair.

A: What? This happened because you turned up.

B: No. It happened because you were here.

A: I was always here.

B: And I always turn up.

A: Why don't you turn up somewhere else?

B: I will. Eventually. But till then...

A: Till then?

B: I need to finish my job.

A: You did.

B: I still don't know much about you. Or your tradition.

A: Will you go if I tell you?

B: You can't tell me. That's the thing. I have to know on my own. Objectively. What you tell about yourself will be subjective.

A: Okay. But will you go once you are done?

B: Probably.

A: Probably?

B: Probably.

A: What do we do now?

B: I think you are being unfair.

A: How?

B: The boundaries favour you.

A: No.

B: Yes. Boundaries favour the one who draws them.

A: Is that how the system works?

B: Yes. The system.

A: I don't understand.

B: The boundaries should be equal, if at all they are drawn.

A: But then I won't get any space. And I was here. Before you arrived.

B: Just because you were here does not make it your space.

A: What does?

B: One needs to pay the price to own something. That's how the system works. You pay up if you want to claim something as your own.

A: How do I pay?

B: There are several ways to pay.

A: I just want peace.

B: I understand. I am not going to make you pay too much.

A: So tell me—how do I make this space my own? This space. Do you see? This.

B: You can work for me.

A: For you?

B: Yes. It's simple.

A: What do I do?

B: You can organize my notes. I have another notebook. You can write things down as I dictate. That way, you will also get to know the world. All the things I have discovered. Everything.

A: Hmm.

B: You do that for me, and I respect your boundaries.

A: Okay. And we take turns in sleeping.

B: Yes. Make sure you sleep whenever I am not sleeping.

Scene 3

(The rope is right in the middle of the stage, dividing it into two equal halves. A and B are on either sides. They are sitting. B has his rough notebook in his hand, A has another notebook. A is ready to write.)

B: Shall we?

A: Yes.

B: Alright. My notes are all over the place. I don't know where to begin (keeps turning pages)—here. Yes. So...title it- 'language'.

A: Language?

B: Yes. Language, with a capital L.

A: Okay.

B: Below it, start writing- 'This is the story of a strange land that I discovered, where they spoke a strange language, with ugly sounds and crude diction.'

A: Ugly sounds and...

B: and crude diction. Diction.

A: Diction. Alright.

B: I can't tell you how funny these people were.

A: Yeah?

B: Yes. I pitied them, because they knew nothing. Not even a graceful language.

A: That's sad.

B: Yes. Imagine. I was so disturbed by their state. I thought I should teach them. But they refused to learn. It is okay to be ignorant, but it is not okay to not be open to knowledge and new learning. That way, you are better than them.

A: (slight smile) Thank you.

B: Okay. Let's continue.

(We see them mime. B is dictating, and A is obediently writing. Time lapse- through light or music, or both.)

B: Done with that sentence?

A: Yes.

B: Good. Next chapter now. It's called 'Boundaries'.

A: Boundaries?

B: Yes.

A: Is it about...

B: Yes.

A: Is it...

B: Yes. Now start writing.

A: Okay.

B: "This section is about an interesting idea of boundaries. What do boundaries reveal about human beings who draw them?"

A: I don't know.

B: I am not asking you. Just write it.

A: Oh okay.

B: "...beings who draw them. It shows how people wish to limit themselves. Drawing boundaries is setting limits to one's imagination, which is, otherwise, infinite. It shows a mindset that is regressive and traditional. I visited a land where people gave too much weight to tradition. To the extent that they did not know what to do when tradition failed them."

A: I don't like this.

B: If you accept this, you can learn. Otherwise, you remain the same.

A: It is wrong.

B: Objectively, it's true.

A: You keep saying objectively even though it's your opinion.

B: Opinion becomes knowledge.

A: When?

B: When boundaries favour you.

A: I thought you were against boundaries.

B: I am.

A: Doesn't seem like it.

B: I wouldn't mind if you take this away (pointing at the rope).

A: That would give you free rein. You will interfere.

B: I won't.

A: You will. You did.

B: I won't if you keep working for me.

A: How long?

B: Till I am done.

A: So you are saying we don't need the rope?

B: I never needed it.

A: You won't interfere you said?

B: If you keep working for me.

A: And it will make me wise you said?

B: If you pay attention.

(A thinks. But we know he will agree.)

Scene 4

(Years have passed. There is no sign of any boundary, any rope. B is dictating, and A is writing, like a loyal disciple.)

B: And now, we reach our conclusion.

A: Is that all, sir?

B: Yes. We have reached the end of our book.

A: That is sad.

B: Yes. But it is what it is. Ready ?

A: Always.

B: Okay. Write then: “And there was one more land—the people there did not know who they are. Involved with the most ludicrous of practices, they did not hesitate to...” Ah, what’s the word?

A: Betray?

B: Uh-Uh.

A: Kill?

B: Nope. Let me think.

A: Invade?

B: Invade. Yes. Thanks.

A: What is the story?

B: Oh, it was a bizarre land. I do not know much about it except this: the person was stubborn and narrow-minded. He was not open to knowledge and learning. He kept to himself.

A: How long did you stay there?

B: Not much. I did not. Could not.

A: Why?

B: He always drew boundaries and maintained them.

A: The way I did, initially?

B: Yes, but with a lot more conviction and stubbornness. He was impenetrable. I could not enlighten him.

A: Very limiting.

B: Very. He was ready for war.

A: Was he?

B: Yes. He threatened to fight and Kill.

A: What did you do?

B: I tried. I tried for long.

A: He did not understand?

B: No. He had weird ideas of ownership. He considered that space to be his own, and refused to give in.

A: How could he?

B: I told him about the price one needs to pay. I told him about the system. He said he doesn't believe in any systems. He said he doesn't believe in me.

A: Oh.

B: Yes. So we do not have much to write now. Except that he was-

A: Narrow minded, stubborn, limited, and one can only pity him.

B: Yes. Exactly. You speak my language now. I am proud.

A: And I am grateful.

B: You can finish the rest of the thing, can't you?

A: Yes. I know exactly what to write.

B: Great then. I have something for you that I offered you the first time we met.

A: Yeah?

B: Yes.

(B takes out a clock from his bag. It is working, is fancy, is 'modern'. Gives it to A.)

B: Perhaps now, you can throw your older thing.

A: Thank you. Should I?

B: Upto you.

A: It reminds me of what I used to be.

B: Do you like the way you used to be?

A: I don't know.

B: Think. Meanwhile, I will lie down. And do finish the thing.

A: Yes. I shall.

(B lies down, occupying all the space there is. A awkwardly, but happily stands. Satisfied with himself, he is writing in the notebook B provided him with.)

The end