

# THE PLAY\*

by

Asijit Datta



## CHARACTERS:

Director/Scriptwriter (Gender not important, a woman here): **A**

Actor (Gender not important, a middle-aged man here): **A1**

Actor (Gender not important, a middle-aged woman here): **A2**

Audience (Gender not specified): **A4**

## SETTING:

**A** enters the scene. Dumps clothes. Dumps chairs. Places 4 Chairs in a 'bow and arrow' position. The bow's semicircle is occupied by **A**, **A1**, **A2**, the wood and the string uniting them (as if). The arrow's end is **A4**'s chair. A camera is placed diametrically opposite to **A**, such that **A** can look directly into the camera eye, and the lens can cover the entire expanse of the setting.

During the course of the play chairs keep coming closer to each other to enable frequent shift in **A**'s roles. Towards the end, chairs should form a square, two lines cutting each other and forming a cross. The voices of all four must slip over each other, deforming the previous speeches and forming new ones. **A** is seen covering the chairs with the individual costume of each character- grey long shirt for **A1**, blue skirt for **A2**, green gown for **A4**. **A** is dressed in casual something up, casual something down, colour not important; exhibits a peculiar habit of rubbing her hands, and stroking her forehead hard whenever she's confounded by an idea, or stage setting.

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A: (*speaking to no one*) You can't be everything. That's the only tragedy with any profundity. I can't sit on all the chairs. I want to. That is the only thing I have ever wanted. Sitting on all these four chairs. Or at least from the day consciousness emanated like an embryonic worm from a hole. Or at least since the beginning of misreading myself as an artist. All the chairs. Nothing less. Of course, I can, right now, but not simultaneously. Yes, I can imagine myself, four of my selves snuggled in these chairs listening to each other and waiting peacefully for their turn to speak. Or not so peacefully, yelling outside their turn, over each other, inside each other's mouths, using the tongue of the other. That is freedom if you ask me. Being all of them, and speaking in four different voices at the same time. But they would name it something fancy, like dissociative disorder or some other muck and throw me inside a nuthouse; not that I dislike the idea, not that I haven't thought about it. But I wouldn't like all those histrionics, those slurring, and scamping, and scrambling, breakfast at 8 and dinner at 8 again, brouhaha over nothing in particular, and too many stories. This is precisely my problem with asylums. That the fiction from those mad mouths is never settled, a discharge that doesn't fall on the ground, a bullet that doesn't reach the skin or the wall (in the air for some time, into the clouds for some time and then lost), no culmination, no termination of line, no ending, yes, not that they can't be borrowed, or that the inhabitants there are any lesser authors than the ones outside, but how should I put it, their spiels are apparitions, a yarn with excess filament, too fibrous, a dead anecdote. Otherwise, it's a decent place; the only place where people are out with their variations. And I, I need a certain degree of tranquillity to think. (*To the camera*) Imagine this as a madhouse and I would have all the other three chairs tenanted;

my fellow madmen sharing their share of nonsense as part of our evening group activity, or stretching of legs to increase metabolism, or group therapy for cognitive skills. Don't imagine this room as anything else then. This room is this room and nothing else. There are four chairs. One inhabited at this moment, others empty, garmented all, and the one who sits is trying to write a new play, or is at least imagining a new play. It is a play about two individuals in love, or one of them in love with the other, the other still in love but desiring to move outside the habit of loving, or the boredom of being with the same person all these years, or fearing the love of the one still in love, in a terrified reverence of that power that only few possess, or avoiding self-destruction, and therefore the need to escape. We never get to know the intention of the one in love, we don't know why he is silent, even I don't know why he would refuse to speak even in the end when the play will be in absolute chaos. Perhaps, he thinks silence is the only valid reaction of the one suffering in love, or wordlessness and love are sisters, or that to speak is to destroy all the efforts of all these years of endless shedding, or maybe he is so acclimatized to this lessening that it has stopped mattering (or is it too much pride to show that it does matter?), and this is exactly what repulses the other, the stench of this decaying flesh outside motion, the niff from that unopened mouth, or the terror of the tongue that will explode someday and of the hurtling of unstoppable words. That is the whole idea. Therefore, it is simple. She is not out of love, but non-loving, or maybe out of love and therefore non-loving, we do not know, even I do not know, even in the end, a dark sky, and she wants to leave the house. Their house. But she can't as they have deployed the military outside. Why? I just said. We don't know. Even I do not know. Even in the end, a dark sky. So, loving first, leaving then, not being able to

leave third, my play fourth, sorry I missed one in the middle, after the failure to leave, conversations fourth, my play fifth. That's the sequence. There (*pointing to A4*), to help me write the play, to offer another point of view. I mean, always important to have an objective stand, a seat; just for the creative process, nothing else, I have, on my extreme left, someone from the audience. Anyone. Age, gender, class, nothing is important. It's such a simple play. Once I write it, they will all say, "Ah, the playwright lied in the author's magazine, said this, said that, that he had to imagine an audience for the writing process!" And I will avoid all that. I will be happy if they find it simple and pay for their seats. Everything except hunger is simple. Everything, even love. And the artist is on his feet at the end of the line. The most dangerous thing for an artist is the realization of his limits. That I am not allowed beyond this thought, this perversion, this bend of the body, this blood, this horror. Not that I can't conceive a murderer eating his victims, not that, never that, I can even see myself doing these (in the name of love of course), but the limit is in...NOTHING! I say the word and I cease to be an artist. I'll be an artist after the book. After the book. After the play. After this play.

**A;** (*to A1, bending beside him*) So, the play begins with one spot over you. And then another spot on her. And then she erupts into her yattering. Your face is grim, as if you don't remember how to even grin anymore, as if you don't have zygomaticus major in your mouth, do you know the function of this muscle? Do you know its function? It's going to be such a problem if you don't speak. You don't speak to her, for a lot of reasons, in the name of love of course, but why not to me? I see no real reasons, except one, that you're suffering in this play. And she is not the only one responsible. So, zygomaticus major and minor,

it assists in facial expressions, and you have none. So we can conclude that this particular muscle is missing from your mouth. Your head is almost perpetually bowed. And times when you're extremely affected by her or by me, you raise your head a little, fill your mouth with air from outside and inflate your cheeks. Do you understand what you are, your nature? Do you understand? God, he wouldn't speak! No wonder she's leaving you. I would've killed you.

**A:** (*back to her seat, to A2*) Light falls on you next. And then flat lights flood the stage. And please, this is not personal. Not my understanding of love. It's just that I don't support you in this. And I will write objectively. An artist should always be objective, stand at a distance and be a peeping tom. No she can enter their heads of course, mutual respect for them entering hers, but then, she should never forget that in the end she will put them up for auction, she will throw them to the dogs, that she can't love them enough, that it's temporal. Thus, I can afford to sadistically negate you for your lack of love, or decision of non-loving. How could you forget? The way he would look at you for days, while you slept, to find out which grain he loved the least, which root in your scalp had less wonder, which nail echoed less desire? Days he would faint talking, talking and talking of all the intensities, the imbalance of it all? And now this man without his zygomaticus major and minor! What a pity! How do you not realize that all pure love is death? That all those who know how to love are dead, not literally of course, but dead, a certain spectral aura about them, they become weightless over the hours, and the only weight they have is of the other. That is the only authentic exchange possible. Everything else is partial, plagued, perfunctory.

A: *(walking towards A2)* I know you loved him not lesser. Why do you want to leave then? Why do you never want him to speak?

*(While speaking A wears A2's costume and takes her seat)*

A2: *(change of voice)* You know I did the same thing. You know you're burdening me unnecessarily with the decision of his mutedness. You are doing this for the play, isn't it? Awakening this erroneous villain, this distorted being who loses all her legitimacy if she walks out of this door, if she exerts her rights? Don't go over there while am talking to you. I can't speak onto the darkness. *(Looking just beside the camera for the expressions to be as clearly visible as possible)*. You know I never denied that he taught me to feel, touch, smell, hear. Everything. I gave him love and he responded with art. I found myself when I lost myself in the poetry he would write. I was the only one, his only reader. Life and its ambivalences, its miseries, the suturing that words need, to arrive at an expression, the pain and the rot, the only constant, love and truth their adversaries, I know, I have known it all from him, there were days when even god seemed insubstantial against his miraculous force. He taught me silence. Word over word over word spent to churn out silence. But I am also his monster. The giant who has overgrown his teachings. The barbarian who is far too civilized to sleep in the same bed with him. That is how it is. I don't want to be dead. You only learn this futile dignity from dead bodies. In the end they are either ash or bones, neither very useful. I am so tired of ghosts, when they walk you don't hear them, you just feel this constant fall of breaths on your nape. That is all. Not that they don't have language. But I am deaf to that. I don't hear him anymore. Few months back, his face turned into a fragment, like a half-formed mudface clawed, then slowly it started dissipating, like ice, finally only

embers left now, of his face only embers. All I see now is a man with limbs and stomach and neck and over that flakes of fire. I want to leave. I am leaving right now.

*(Gets up, goes in the direction of A)*

**A:** *(towards A1's chair)* You can't go anywhere. Military outside, remember? *(to A1)* Stop being so hurt, she's not leaving.

*(Wears A1's costume. Sits on his chair. Loses all expressions. Cheeks bloated. Fifteen seconds.)*

**A:** *(Back to her chair to A2)* Thanks to the military then, their guns and tear gases, their sticks and barricades. You can't leave. If you step outside they'll put you in a straitjacket spread insecticide on you and burn you in parts and send you back upstairs. You don't realize, the scars from love are a privilege. He is older than you, isn't it?

*(Suddenly ooks at A4. Shouts)*

Is the argument strong enough for you? Does it make sense? Tell me if you are bored, you will, won't you?

*(Shifts to A4's chair and wears his/her costume)*

**A4:** Yes, it's simple. Quite simple. But it doesn't have any sex. They have sex in cinema. I like cinema more. This is like two telephone receivers plugged to my earhole and listening to a long droning sound. But this isn't all too bad. I close my eyes sometimes and think of how peaceful my love has been... I mean peaceful in comparison to this, of course. My suggestion is you end it now. Nothing should drag on eternally, nothing except religion. Not human love surely. I can sense a yawn rising from the depths of my guts.



*(A walks fast, head bowed, back to her chair)*

**A:** Why don't you leave then? I have kept the exit signs on. And there has been no disclaimer from my side that staying the entire length is mandatory. Have you even read it in the poster, or has there been any order from the government that it is imperative, coming for my play I mean. Just fucking leave!

*(A goes back to A4, head held high)*

**A4:** How many times will you repeat it yourself? Or hear me repeat? Or listen to the obvious? Of course, I can't leave. There is military outside. They will put me in a straitjacket, throw me in the waters and when I am just about to die they'll pull me out and send me back upstairs. I can't leave. I am stuck with this nonsense. And you know what they say about insulting the audience? We never come back. And we stop others from reaching you as well.

*(A drags the chair closer to the others and returns with a furious force)*

**A:** If you can't leave, you can at least enjoy the benefit of sitting closer to us. Not in the middle. In the front row, now that we know that the theatre is empty. Why not four, instead of three? It will pass the time a wee easier. And about the audience part, this won't be staged ever perhaps. This will not be a play. Just a book. Not on the stage, just the page, the page.

*(Looking back at A2)*

He is older than you, isn't it?

**A2:** Dropped like a bomb in the middle of rains and rains 12 years before my peaceful arrival on a summer afternoon. Do you even know that he

was born on the day of Hiroshima? 6<sup>th</sup> August. Earlier it used to fascinate me, now it makes me puke. As if out of nuclear waste. As if the only man alive in the heap of all the dead. And the day he decided to go dumb on everyone. I would go on for hours and he will sit there silently watching me. I felt like plucking that useless tongue out of his mouth, or blowing his teeth out with a hammer. That is what I received from him, his violence. It spilled over. It always does. And I am afraid of this frenzied love. And I want the police to go away, the state to remove the fences and the roadblocks. He is insane, insane, insane! Now I know why you can empathize with him. When you think of him it fascinates you. All your anguishes and anxieties are his clothes, that's all he has, a borrowed garment, you don't even give him speech. I will go back home and find sanity there.

**A;** *(back to her chair)* So you wrench his tongue and then choose the life of a saint? You think he has lived his life and you have all those years left. You tell me you've considered killing yourself, that anything is accepted, even death, anything except this love from him. When it was your turn, you blindfolded yourself, drank poison as if, thought and talked death, informed him about your night terrors where you found him strangling you. And now you are leaving. All this light will crush him, you know that, and yet you... I will... I will do the only thing I can. *(Furious)* I will take the light away from you. I will snatch your words. I will throw you in darkness forever.

*(In a rage A walks over to A2)*

**A2:** You don't affect me anymore, I'm already outside. Why do you have a camera here? Don't I know you're recording this bloody thing? This process of creation, or whatever fuck you call it? Don't I know you?

You will sell this too. Then they'll write books on you, they will hold debates arguing where you really have gone round the bend, if you are a mad artist, or a straight demented one, or deranged, hysterical, a criminal with artistic instincts, and still some will say this is a trope you have used. And you'll be silent in the face of everything. You will shut yourself indoors and watch your images on screen. And laugh. In the absence of others, the corners of your mouth will join in the middle of your forehead, like a circle, like a fucking circle. I know all your damn tricks, all in the name of art. A mad artist has a colossal archival value, a monstrous longevity. I know it all. I know who you are. I will tell the world whether you really are mad, or an authentic artist. You are... you are... you are... why am I repeating this phrase? You are... you are... you are... I want to say everything. I want your readers to know. You are... you are... you are...you... why am I repeating? Is this the point where you cut me off? You make me echo like a, like a, like your fucking actor and you take away my line, the most important line. You are erasing it before you write it. Is it because you know, you know, you know you'll never finish this one, not even this one, so you record it,

*(The camera zooms in on A2 at this point)*

I won't be surprised if you have someone zooming the camera on me right now, if you have paid someone to be there, you know you will say this is the book, this, this slime, this dirt recorded is your book, this is the fucking play. Right? Have I spoken too much? *(Zooms out)* Are you going to cut me off again? Are you goi...

**A:** *(to the camera)* Please don't think that I'm deliberately engaging in some sort of psychotic shit or employing a schizoid motif here. No, not even close. I am simply trying to take the opinion of my characters into consideration. Do you want an author, a writer who dumps his

grief, his trauma, his incisions on his creation? You will call me covetous then. No, rather, I listen to them, not only what they have to say about each other, but about me, mostly about me. This is not going to be written. The book will be different. The book will be sooooo different. I am almost done here. You have not realized it, but you're already on the last page. That is the whole aesthetics of it, that you didn't feel time passing. And suddenly, one day, you're on the last page. Or am I exaggerating? I will go back now.

*(This part is primarily rushed gibberish and a lot of movements from one chair to the other. The chairs form a square.)*

*(To A1)*

You ruined my play I think. Had you spoken one word! Even one meaningless word to let them know how horribly angry you were...one sound even...one raised finger even...say anything...say one fucking word to me...

**A1:** *(Responds with inflated cheeks again, now 5 seconds)*

**A2;** *(to A)* What did I tell you? He is a fucking tongueless bastard. I will rather sleep with a wagging tail of a lizard.

**A4:** *(to A1)* I find you charming. I think it's your tragedy. Why don't you say that you hate them, you hate their language. Let the police leave, and you and I will walk out, holding old hands, in silence.

**A:** *(to A2)* If they don't come to the theatre it's your fault. You decided to leave all of us. I will hold you culpable. In the next editions I will strike out most of your lines and eventually wipe out your character, make you baggage, make you memory, and give him all the words possible. I'll make him the devil who abandons. *(To A4)* Now you suddenly love

my character? There is no middle path. You either love my play and my lover or none at all.

A4: (to A) Fuck you. I have paid for my ticket.

A2: (to A) Fuck you too. Let them call back the military, I am leaving.

*(This part is just rapid shifting of A to all the chairs almost at once)*

A1: *(Responds with inflated cheeks again, now 5 seconds)*

A4: I want

A2: This

A4: Him

A: My book

A1: *(Responds with inflated cheeks again, now 3 seconds)*

A2: is horror

A4: To leave

A: My play

A1: *(Responds with inflated cheeks again, now 2 seconds)*

A4: Your play

A2: This play

A: That play. (To A1) Not a play. (To A2) A book. (To A4) A page. (To the camera) A word.

*(Lights off)*