

THE PROBLEM WITH LANGUAGE

a short play

by

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Cast

LISHA

MARK

Setting

Theatre Foyer.

Time

Interval.

The Problem With Language by Alex Broun

Foyer. Interval. **MARK** approaches **LISHA**.

MARK: Hi.

LISHA: Hello again.

PAUSE.

MARK: Enjoy the first act ?

LISHA: Absolutely. And you ?

MARK: Not really.

LISHA: Oh well. Maybe Act Two.

MARK: Yes. (PAUSE) Listen ... about before, I didn't mean to upset you.

LISHA: You didn't.

MARK: I wasn't thinking.

LISHA: I've forgotten already.

MARK: It's just that you walked away quite quickly – I thought I'd upset you.

LISHA: You didn't.

MARK: Then why did you walk away quickly ?

LISHA: My sushi wrapper. Had to put it in the bin.

MARK: Before you went in ?

LISHA NODS.

MARK: Well I'm glad. (PAUSE) That's why I didn't enjoy the first act. I kept thinking that I'd upset you. I felt ... bad.

LISA: But you didn't upset me.

MARK: Still it was thoughtless.

LISHA: No big deal.

MARK: I just didn't like it.

LISHA: As you said.

MARK: But that's just my opinion. Other people ...

LISHA: Did.

MARK: I mean there was a lot of applause. And you were great – as usual.

LISHA: Thanks.

MARK: But as for the whole piece – it just didn't grab me.

LISHA: As you said.

MARK: I was actually quite surprised it won.

LISHA: But it did.

PAUSE.

MARK: Is Max your boyfriend ?

LISHA: (LAUGHING) No.

MARK: I thought that might explain why you got so ... upset.

LISHA: I didn't get upset.

MARK: I mean if he was your boyfriend and I told you I didn't like his short film then naturally you would get pretty upset. I didn't think about that ... possibility and I should have.

PAUSE.

LISHA: Max is not my boyfriend.

MARK: No ?

LISHA: But he is my friend. And if – if – I did get a bit upset when you said his film was bad – which I didn't – then I would be perfectly within my rights to do so.

MARK: Completely.

LISHA: But like I said. I didn't.

PAUSE.

MARK: Like.

LISHA: Yes. Like I said.

MARK: No. I mean me.

LISHA: You ?

MARK: Not bad.

LISHA: What ?

MARK: I said like. Me.

LISHA: Are you asking me if I ... ?

MARK: I said I didn't *like* Max's film. Not that it was a *bad* film.

LISHA: Well, that's not what I heard.

MARK: But that's what I said. That's the problem with language.

LISHA: Is it ?

MARK: I say one thing but you hear another.

LISHA: Really ?

MARK: I say x but your interpretation of what I say is y so you actually think you heard me say y when all along what I actually said was x.

LISHA: I heard what you said.

MARK: What you thought I said. But actually your mind twisted my words into something quite different. (PAUSE) It's quite a common phenomena. You'd be surprised. I teach linguistics and I come across it all the time. So don't feel bad. It's an everyday mistake.

LISHA: You said bad.

MARK: No. That's just what you heard. But I didn't say it.

MARK SMILES. PAUSE. LISHA LOOKS AT MARK.

LISHA: Who are you ?

MARK: (LAUGHS) I'm Mark.

- LISHA: I know your name but who are you ?
- MARK: Just Mark.
- LISHA: But what do you actually do ?
- MARK: Teach linguistics.
- LISHA: I *meant* tonight. What are you actually doing here tonight ? I see you at a lot of these things – just hanging around. Is that what you do ? Just hang around. Like you were at Max's film.
- MARK: I came to see the play.
- LISHA: But why ? Do you have a professional interest in the linguistics? Or do you just *like* hanging around ?
- MARK: A friend invited me.
- LISHA: What friend ? I never see you with anyone. You're always alone.
- MARK: They're over there.
- LISHA: Are they ? Or did you just make them up ? Did your mind *twist* them into existence ? Have you got a ticket ?
- MARK: What ?
- LISHA: Are you actually meant to be here ? Or did you just gate crash ? Is that what you are – a professional gate crasher who turns up at these things to tell people how bad their friends' films are ?
- MARK: (SOFT) I'm sorry.
- LISHA: I can't *hear* you ?
- MARK: I said I was sorry.
- LISHA: Sorry ? Did you *say* you were sorry ? Or is that just what my twisted little mind *heard* ?
- MARK: It was just my opinion.
- LISHA: Well who asked for your opinion ? Who gives a fuck about what you think ? I don't, Max certainly doesn't and neither does anybody else here tonight – even you're so called "friend". Your opinion doesn't mean shit so next time you should just keep it to yourself.

PAUSE. **MARK** LOOKS AT **LISHA**. HE TURNS AND EXITS.
LISHA WATCHES HIM GO.

LISHA: Oh shit. Shit ! Mark ... (EXITING) Mark !

END PLAY.