

Cal and Luke

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A short play

By Benjamin J head

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ACT 1 - - SCENE 1

*A huge pile of building blocks sits on one side of the stage. Two chairs on the other.*

*A shadow works on the mountain. Building a tower out of the bricks. He seems to be good at building too; the tower he's working on is at least five feet tall, looking like a half-finished Empire State Building.*

*The bricks are semi-translucent and glow when placed together, lit by a stage light from above or below.*

*There is another old tower in the darkness of the stage as if it has been forgotten about. It is not lit up.*

AT RISE:

(The man working at the bricks is LUKE, the first thing that hits us is his age - way old. He works skillfully on his tower, sometimes almost frantically.)

Sometimes the bricks don't fit, sometimes he has to balance them. He's totally engaged in building. So much so, he doesn't see:

CAL ENTERS.

CAL is much younger than LUKE. She takes in the room; LUKE. The bricks. Naïve but not too so. Filled with potential.)

CAL

Hello? They just sent me here from-

LUKE

From where?

CAL

(points)

Out there. From orientation. They said that I had to come in here and that someone would show me what to do.

(LUKE nods slowly. Knowing.)

LUKE

I see.

(And back to his work. CAL stands there awkwardly for a moment.)

CAL

What do you do? Sorry - What do we do?

LUKE

Build.

CAL

(repeats to herself)

Build.

(She looks round.)

CAL (CONT'D)

Build what?

(LUKE hurls his bricks back. He didn't need this, he's got towers to build.)

LUKE

(he begins, laboured, rehearsed)

Welcome to Room Two. Room Two is where the company's building work is competed. You'll find that we like to think of our employees as members of one large family and so 'we' wish to take this opportunity to welcome you to your new job. We want you too feel as comfortable and relaxed as possible as a member of our team. During your working day you'll be expected to build the towers that keep our organization moving forward and -

CAL

What towers? You said something about towers?

(LUKE points to a tower.)

CAL (CONT'D)

Oh. And all you do is build towers all day?

LUKE

(wants to go back to doing just that)

Yes.

CAL

(taking this in)

And that's all we have to do? We just build?

LUKE

Just build. One complete tower can keep the company running for five hundred years.

CAL

(she lights up)

Cool! I can do that!

(She begins to build. Luke carries on with his tower.

Then after a moment.)

CAL (CONT'D)

This is my first job. Right out of University. It's not the only one I applied to though. They gave me an interview on Tuesday and then now I'm here. I'm Callan by the way. I'm really sorry, what did you say your name was?

LUKE

Luke.

CAL

Okay. That's cool. I went to primary school with a boy called Luke. He's an electrician now. Although I haven't spoken to him in ages. We were never that close. It's a nice name though.

(LUKE is not interested.)

CAL (CONT'D)

I talk to much. I know I talk to much, so if there is ever a time when you want me to stop, just say.

LUKE

I want you to stop.

CAL  
(thinking that LUKE is joking)

That's funny.

(Her blocks start to fall down.)

CAL (CONT'D)  
Oh no! Is there a special way I should be doing this? Like a specific technique or something? I'm trying to stick them together but it's not really working.

LUKE  
Everyone has their own technique. Although they say there is a right way.

CAL  
What is the right way?

LUKE  
I never learnt it. It took many years of building to get this tower. And it's still not finished. I've spent most of my life building it. I feel like I've never left this room.

CAL  
Really? I suppose that means I have a long way to go?

LUKE  
I would say so.

CAL  
Speaking of leaving the room, I am really thirsty, like I could do with a glass of water or something. Is there a water fountain or a vending machine in the corridor?

LUKE  
What corridor?

CAL  
Out there? I'm going to go look. Is there one down the hall?

LUKE  
(frank, dark.)  
You can never leave this room. You can't stop building your tower.

CAL  
What?

LUKE

There is no door. If you stop building the lights go off.

CAL

(concerned)

What do you mean? If we stop building the towers?

LUKE

Yes. The lights will go off. That will be it.

CAL

That will be it?

LUKE

(sombre)

That will be it.

CAL

What will happen to us?

(LUKE says it all in a single look then goes right back to building.

Taking it in. CAL starts to look around. Suddenly there is more urgency to build her tower.)

CAL (CONT'D)

How do you get out?

LUKE

Get out?

CAL

Of this room-

LUKE

I was told that when I completed my tower I could leave. But not before.

CAL

And how long ago was that, exactly?

LUKE

Many, many years. So many that I can't remember.

CAL

Luke, how long has it been like that?

LUKE

(sore)

That isn't important.

(CAL carries on building. The blocks keep collapsing. They have to be balanced.)

LUKE sees that she is struggling.)

LUKE (CONT'D)

You have to take more care.

CAL

They won't stay together.

LUKE

You have to be careful how you place them. It is not a race. It has to be done correctly. There are no shortcuts. Watch me.

(He slowly takes a block from the pile and rests it in position. It is an art form.)

CAL

It just takes so long. There must be a faster way.

LUKE

I wish there was. I have spent my life building this tower and I am still nowhere near finishing. It is my life's work.

CAL

Have you ever tried to build faster?

LUKE

The bricks always fall.

CAL

There has to be another way.

(She stops building and starts to look around.  
LUKE notices this and isn't happy.)

LUKE

What are you doing?

CAL

I want to look around. There must be a way out.

LUKE

There isn't one. You have to keep building!

CAL

(dismissive)

I will, I will. Hold on. Calm down.

LUKE

No! You have to build.

(CAL finds the old tower that isn't lit up. Almost finished. It is covered in dust.

She drags it into the light and inspects it.)

CAL

What is this?

LUKE

I don't know! You must build your tower!

CAL

But Luke, this one is almost finished.

LUKE

I wouldn't know.

CAL

It is. Look at it. It just needs a few more bricks and then it's completed. Why haven't you finished this one? You could have been out of here ages ago!

LUKE

That isn't how it works! You must build your own!

(The stage lights start to flicker on and off.

LUKE gets more upset.)

LUKE (CONT'D)

This is what I am talking about! Please! You must build!

CAL

But what about this one?

LUKE

Your own! You must build your own.

(As the flickering gets worse CAL stares at the old tower. Thinking about her options.

LUKE is getting more frantic as the darkness gets closer.)

LUKE (CONT'D)

Hurry! Build now!

(CAL darts across the room and add a brick to her small tower. The lights come back on full.

They both relax.)

CAL

That was scary.

LUKE

That was dangerous. You could have killed us both.

CAL

I'm sorry.

(The pair build for a short time. CAL's curiosity is building inside her.)

CAL (CONT'D)

How long has it been like this?

LUKE

(reluctant)

The company changed their policy on building towers after I got this job. They said the business needed us to stay and build. I was a little older than you and I took this job one holiday because I needed the money. Now here I am.

CAL

Who's 'us'? You said 'the business told us'. Who is us?

(LUKE sighs.)

LUKE

You are here to replace someone who left.

CAL

Someone who got out?

LUKE

No.

CAL

Then what? They finished their tower?

LUKE

No.

CAL

(realizing)

Oh no. Oh no! They died didn't they? Someone died in this room. Someone worked their whole life and died here without finishing their tower! Who would let that happen?

LUKE

You are over-reacting. Your parents had to do this. As did mine. This is the way things work.

CAL

(freaking out)

Who would let a life mean nothing like that? Who would die having only a half built tower to their name? This is wrong! This is so very wrong and you know it! And you just let it happen. What is wrong with this place?

LUKE

Calm down.

CAL

You don't even care. Do you?

LUKE

It is the way things work here.

CAL

Saying that doesn't make it right.

(CAL begins to calm down.)

LUKE

(quietly)

I know.

(Slowly, the young girl starts to build again. All the time glancing over to the old tower.

After another short time.)

CAL

Have you ever tried to escape?

(LUKE ignores her.)

CAL (CONT'D)

Have you ever tried to escape? Have you? Is it possible? Did you ever even try?

LUKE

Once.

CAL

And?

LUKE

(angry)

It didn't work. Be quiet and build.

CAL

Have you ever seen a completed tower?

LUKE

No.

CAL

Have you tried to build on that one?

LUKE

No.

CAL

What would happen if you did?

LUKE

Nothing.

CAL

How do you know? You have never even tried it. We could both build that tower and get out of here today. Right now!

LUKE

It's impossible.

CAL

But you've never even tried!

(CAL takes a brick and runs over to the old tower. Standing on a chair, she places the brick at the top.

The lights flicker. The old tower starts to glow very gently.)

CAL (CONT'D)

See! Look! It's glowing!

LUKE

This isn't going to work. You are putting yourself in danger.

CAL

No I'm not. I'm getting out of here.

(With that she frantically starts to complete the old tower. Every brick she places makes it glow more.

All the time the lights are flickering and getting dimmer and dimmer.)

LUKE

Stop it! Build you own!

(CAL drags the old tower over to the pile of bricks and races to finish it.

The lights flicker more and more. The old tower starts to glow like the Sun. LUKE gets more and more frustrated with what is going on. SHOUTING FOR HER TO STOP. He bolts to the side of the room and tries to hide. Protecting himself.

Then: CAL adds the final piece to the tower and the lights shut off completely. The tower stands there glowing.

CAL looks to LUKE and the pair watch in awe of it.

The glow of the tower now lights up the exit which has appeared.

CAL moves towards it. She stops and gestures for LUKE.)

CAL

Come on! What are you waiting for? This is it! This is the way out.

LUKE

Go on without me.

CAL

What? No! You are coming! This is freedom, no more towers! Hurry.

(A pause.)

LUKE

I can't go.

CAL

Can't or won't? The world is out here. A different life to building towers all day in a room without windows. Out here there are trees and fields and warm Summer days. Chances and opportunities wait. You could have the life you dreamed of instead of being locked in this prison and being forced to stack building blocks all day like a slave. What do you say? It's one step through this door.

LUKE

I can't. It is too much of a risk.

CAL

Luke-

LUKE

I am sorry. I can't go out there.

(CAL hangs her head. Slowly SHE EXITS through the open doorway leaving LUKE alone on stage.

When she has gone LUKE smashes the old tower to pieces in a hysterical fit and scatters the bricks back into the pile.

The lights come back up. He quietly goes back to building his own tower.

RYAN ENTERS.

(RYAN is another young man. Wearing a suit that is too big for him he bounces into the room and holds out a hand for LUKE to shake.)

RYAN

Hello sir. They just sent me in here from orientation. Pleased to meet you.

LUKE

Pleased to meet you.

BLACKOUT.

*The End.*