



PICCADELERIUM

BY

BELLA LAWRENCE

WHY I LIKE IT: *Drama Editor EZRA NEIGHBORS writes...* There's an age-old saying my mother loved to quip, "Not my monkeys. Not my circus." She would usually crack this gem whenever there was utter buffoonery afoot. *Piccadelerium* by Bella Lawrence truly invokes the chaotic delirium of a circus fever dream. Maybe this circus tent was fumigated with some hallucinogenic pesticides? It may explain the predatory ringleaders preying upon a motley crew of performers, fire breathers with bad timing, and the clown with great timing. Through the misty haze of pre-show anticipation, playwright Bella Lawrence's sense of poetic cadence thrives in dialogue stylings of twins finishing each other's thoughts and individual characters' fourth-wall-breaking soliloquies. Whatever they're huffing under this tent you'll sure want a hit of next. (Spacing is playwright's own.)

Piccadelerium

Bella Lawrence

Cast of Characters

RIG, the rigger and company manager. *Imagine the stage manager, but of a circus. (Yikes.) More sad than actually stressed out.*

INIGO, the firebreather. *Conceited but not entirely without reason; he works hard.*

RISLEY, half of the Icarian duo. *All her sentences are finished by—*

—RATCHET, the other half of the Icarian duo. They're obsessed with each other, and two halves of the same person. Never not physically touching each other at any given point.

The CLOWN. *Speaks through physical gestures only (Lines listed with a "--" are to aid the actor in understanding the intentions behind the gestures, and are not to be actually spoken). The clown is the only character who sees the audience and speaks to them directly.*

RINGMASTER, the man whose office you don't want to go into alone, and everyone with eyes knows this.

Place

A circus ring, from what we can tell. Can be minimal.

Up until the last "scene," we're in the rehearsal space version of a circus ring. It's colorless, shadowed and chalky. Lights designed to catch the dust plumes of the ring. Minimal circus props are scattered around upstage; must have: blocks, canvas bags, a standing screen, as well as mats for actors' safety. May have a table, tarp, etc. Other props are optional. Pantomime is also welcome, preferably with adroitness.

Time

Negotiable (adjust props and costumes accordingly)

Notes

- Resin: n. a substance that helps the performer grip. Used mainly by aerialists in assisting with difficult maneuvers such as heel, toe and neck hangs. Also used by ballet dancers working on pointe, and musicians playing string instruments.

- Paraffin: n. a fuel that's generally considered the safest fuel for fire breathers. Also used as a fuel for jet engines and rockets, as well as a fuel or component for diesel and tractor engines. Best not to consume on a regular basis.
- *Content disclosure*: referenced coerced sexual intercourse / sexual exploitation in the workplace

Lights.

A barren, empty circus ring. Nothing but dust and lights. Over the loudspeakers, there is a brief buzz followed by the exuberantly joyous voice of the ringmaster.

RINGMASTER (V.O.)

Hey-Hey-Hey-*Hey*, kids! You know what that sound means! It's ten minutes til the start of the show! This is your last chance to ask your parents for some peanuts and popcorn. Be sure to grab your seats, and keep your hands and feet clear of the aisles; sometimes the clowns just don't know a thing about personal space!

Another gaudy chuckle. Loudspeaker recording ends.

Lights. These are our "work lights," not the top-of-show lights.

Enter RIG, in a rush, with bottle of resin. Rig speaks to themselves.

RIG

"Personal space." If only.

Hypocrite.

(calling O.S.) Hey, ensemble. Hey, wasn't someone asking for some resin? Who was asking for the resin? Someone was—

Notices a massive pile of peanut shells centerstage.

Exits and briefly re-enters, with a broom. Starts to fiercely sweep the shells.

Whoever keeps leaving these infuriating little things...

(to themselves) I don't mind cleaning. I don't mind looking after my ensemble. I just can't stand doing these things that are outside my job description. I can't take it that he knows I'm not getting paid any extra for this. Half the hurdles I push through I'm not getting paid for. No one here to help either.

Hey, ensemble, how come I never see any of you warming up anymore? Is it *that* hard to get out here early and warm up? All you have to do is stretch. Walk up and down a tightrope every now and then. Once in awhile catch someone midair or balance spinning plates on your head. All that's got to be so much easier than what I put up with.

Hey, whoever was asking for the resin, I'm leaving it right here! Right here next to the... *(re: large canvas bag among the misc. props onstage)* Woah, what is this?

Moving to approach bag.

RINGMASTER

But you came eagerly.

RIG

Well, sir, I thought you were going to discuss the benefit with me. Last night I thought you were going to / give me that benefit.

RINGMASTER

–Yes, yes, the benefit. Don’t worry about that. It’s going to the right person.

RIG

(quick) Why am I–
... not?

RINGMASTER

My dear, you are right in your own vocation. Stick to what you’re good at.

RIG

Which is?

Beat.

The Ringmaster puts the magnum-sized bottle of champagne in Rig’s hands, while they’re still holding the resin and broom, which allows for some comic and awkward gestures trying to hold it all.

Forcibly, the ringmaster steadies them.

RINGMASTER

I will see you in my office after the show. We’ll have a few drinks. Maybe if you last longer tonight we can reopen the *conferring* about that benefit, hm?

Well, I’ll be off. I have a show to start. How much time?

RIG

(barely audible) Seven minutes...

RINGMASTER

(re: the cigar he’s holding) Throw this away for me?

Rig haplessly flouts that their arms are full.

The Ringmaster leaves the cigar on a block, waves Rig off as he exits.

Rig is alone center, still holding way too much. Holding onto the bottles, attempts sweeping the peanut shells again. Struggles and fails.

RIG

...

Okay, that's it.

Fiercely opens both bottles. Dumps the powdered resin inside the champagne bottle.

I'll certainly be joining you for drinks tonight, sir. I certainly will.

Stirs and shakes the (now probably poisonous) concoction. Leaves it on a block up center.

(calling O.S.) Folks, we are six and a half minutes to places! If you haven't warmed up yet, get your shit together! Inigo! Inigo, you're up first!

Exits proudly, maybe still calling commands O.S.

Enter RISLEY and RATCHET, giggling like school kids, running on hand in hand. Giggling, they dive behind the standing screen, disappearing from our line of sight.

Enter INIGO from other side, with an unlit torch, dressed in costume, though he doesn't look happy about it.

At times he calls out to Rig, other times, he is speaking to himself.

INIGO

(far louder than necessary) RIG?

Rig, did you call me?!

Hey, Rig, have you seen my paraffin? ... Rig? Hello?

Damn. For someone who claims to work so hard, you're never fucking here. Up in the ringmaster's office again, no doubt. I started a bet with Ratchet, actually. Bet three boxes of cigarettes you're sleeping with him. With that great gourmanding thing. Can't imagine sinking that fucking low.

(re: peanut shells or misc. props) What's this?

Who the fuck left-? Rig? RIG?! RIG, YOU SAID YOU WERE GOING TO CLEAN UP SO I COULD COME PRACTICE BEFORE THE SHOOOOW.

Rig?

RIG, I'M GOING TO TAKE YOUR SHIT.

(to himself) God if that fucker is the one who gets the bonus I'm going to be so fucking mad.

Sees the cigar left burning the block.

Well that's a fire hazard.

Takes the cigar. Sensuously and dulcetly (and very literally) eats the flame.

(after swallowing, laughs) Ew, what the fuck? This person has bad fucking tastes.

...

If people like Rig... lazy, talentless people can get away with doing the bare minimum and still reap the benefits of the world, then what does that leave for people like me? When I show up early, when I work hard, I warm up, I make the crowd swoon, and somehow I'm still never the one invited up into that office.

Damn it. I need to show him.

Taking the champagne bottle.

Hello, you. You're not what I'm used to, but you'll have to do. Can't find my lighter fluid. You'll do fine, won't you? Sure you will. I could use a nice champagne. In a few hours, I'll be celebrating anyway. Me and the ringmaster.

I take it back. I was called into his office once before. Last week. I thought it was because he planned to give me the benefit then. Whole ensemble's been mumbling about it for weeks. All wondering who. Nearly pissed my pants with anticipation last week.

But no. Just dissatisfied with my performance, he says. Smile too much, he says. Too proud of what you do, Inigo. Too proud, my boy. Have some humble pie. Ew. To think he has the balls to tell me that. Proud. Like it's supposed to make me feel bad. Yeah I'm proud. I work hard. What do *you* do?

Produces his torch. Lights it.

It's funny how bad I want it. Actually hysterical. A nice little circus joke. There's nothing I can actually spend it on. No stores I can shop in, no bars I can go to. Don't have a life beyond this ring. But I want it. So fucking bad. I just want to— to show him. And I will...

Bracing himself, with magnum sized bottle of champagne.

And here we are... my magnum opus.

Comically intrepid, Inigo takes center stage. He poses, juggles or throws around the torch a few times— whatever his ritual is. Then, with a ridiculous degree of seriousness, he brings the liquor and torch to his lips, ready to blow.

But wait, everything's wrong.

The second he takes a sip of the drink, his eyes widen with the universal look of "oh fuck me."

He spews out the resin drink, which creates the most vibrant, explosive flames the world has ever seen. For the audience, it's a brilliant spectacle— but for Inigo it's horrifying. He's screaming—

He turns from the audience so they can't see his face, holding himself in pain.

FUCK, shit!

RIG!!

Rig, are you-?! *RIG!* Holy shit, *RIG!!*

Still covering his face, Inigo runs off blindly. In his path he knocks over the standing screen—it falls, revealing Risley and Ratchet, who have all this time been fiercely making out with one another—

Inigo doesn't see them; he keeps running until he's exited.

Risley and Ratchet go stiff, now exposed.

RISLEY

Who was—

RATCHET

that? I don't know, I hope it wasn't—

RISLEY

Rig. Oh God. If it was Rig, we're in—

RATCHET

trouble. Again.

RISLEY

Would that even—

RISLEY

The benefit. I know. Should we—?

RISLEY

Honest to God I don't know why we even—

RISLEY

Always telling us what to do.

RISLEY

Which they are.

RISLEY

A little.

RISLEY

No of course not.

RISLEY

Why? They
Rig was talking to him, you know. Just now.

RISLEY

With him.

RATCHET

Matter? Of course. We're losing our chance of getting—

RATCHET

We should. Try, at least.

As they're talking, they start warming up or moving through their foot juggling routine. They will be going through the motions for the rest of their scene, talking the whole time.

RATCHET

listen to Rig. Rig's crazy.

RATCHET

Like they're our boss or something.

RATCHET

A little.

RATCHET

Not the real boss.

RATCHET

... Bet you Rig's the one getting the benefit.

don't They do anything.

RATCHET

Just now?

RATCHET

With who?

RISLEY
The Ringmaster.

RATCHET
When?

RISLEY
Just now. When we were—

Ratchet interrupts her with a kiss.

RATCHET
When that?

RISLEY
Yes. When we were that. Didn't you—?

RATCHET
No, I didn't hear. They were talking about—?

RISLEY
The benefit? Could be. I didn't hear.
But they don't

RATCHET
talk like us. They don't

RISLEY
touch like us.
(*a deep misunderstanding*)
I mean, unless they

RATCHET
(*sharing the misunderstanding*) unless they do.

RISLEY
The two of them were together.

RATCHET
They were together.

A dull reverberating of the opening beats to The Entrance of the Gladiators; the show's about to start.

Curtain's rising.

RATCHET
People watching. Are you—

RISLEY
Ready?
... No.

No, I'm really not.

RATCHET

...

Did you really see Rig and the Ringmaster—

RISLEY

together.

...

Powerful things can happen when the right people are together.

RATCHET

If he already chose Rig, then do we even have—?

He waits for her to finish his sentence. No matter what physical position they're in right now, precarious or otherwise, they take the moment to really look at each other. Tender and tenacious, simultaneously.

Music has ceased reverberating for this moment. When they move again, music starts up, accelerating in rhythm as the actors do.

RISLEY

It isn't worth it anyway.

RATCHET

No. No, it can't be worth all the stress.

RISLEY

All the competition.

RATCHET

Maybe we should—

RISLEY

forget it. Forget all of it.

RATCHET

Hold on, do you really want to—

RISLEY

It's not worth it. Not—

RATCHET

here. Not now. Not with—

RISLEY

the two of them.

RATCHET

RISLEY
go. Now.

RISLEY
go! Take what we can! No time to pack, the—!

RISLEY
What?

RISLEY
peanuts or something. Cotton candy. Food.

RISLEY
Where will we go?

RISLEY
What? We need—

RISLEY
But it's calling to me. I think it said my name.

RISLEY
Each other.
Yes, you're right. You're right. We have to—

Together. You're right.
You're right! We should—

RATCHET
Now? Darling, wait, let's—

RATCHET
curtain's rising. Take the bags there!

RATCHET
The canvas bags here. Rig packed them. There's probably—

RATCHET
Enough to get us by.

Hand in hand, they're gathering canvas bags, trying to drag them out of the ring while the curtain rises.

Risley is really struggling to lift the large bag; Ratchet notices.

RATCHET
Leave it.

RATCHET
It's too heavy.

RATCHET
But we have what we'll need, dearest. All we need is—

RATCHET

run. Now. Before the song ends. Let's—

RISLEY

Yes. Before the song ends.

They leave the large canvas bag center stage as the curtain finishes rising & Entrance of the Gladiators has its final chords, albeit distortedly.

Risley and Ratchet, hand in hand, tumble out of the ring, running forward, towards their future.

The stage is bare.

A light centers around the giant canvas bag left center stage. As the music continues playing, with increasing degrees of compositional distortion, the bag unzips itself from the inside.

The CLOWN emerges, yawning, like he's just been woken from a cat nap. He sees the audience, smiles and waves with a little confusion— he hadn't expected to wake up here. He addresses the audience.

CLOWN *(in comic gestures only)*

- Hi, everyone! You're looking swell. Don't know how I ended up here, but I'm happy to see you all.
- I had a good sleep. Drink put me to bed. Slept *hard*.
- Why was I drinking? I was celebrating! The boss—the ringmaster— and I were celebrating together. He and I are like that. We're good chums, we go way back. It feels good to be at the top of the food chain with him. All that power. It's exalting. Like nothing can hurt you.
- Oh, I should probably tell you. We were celebrating because he gave me the benefit last night. I mean, we celebrate often. We drink often. Give ourselves a little treat at the end of the week pretty much every chance we get. Maybe invite Rig along. Pretty thing. Small, helpless thing, that Rig is. But no, this wasn't about Rig, this was about the Ringmaster and me! Giving me the benefit for all my hard work.
- *(laughing)* I don't actually "work hard," of course. No one worth celebrating actually does.
- Luckily, the ringmaster and I see eye to eye on that. And he gave me a grand ole bonus. A little extra boot money. Do you want to see it, folks? Do you want to see the benefit?

*Takes off his large clown shoe, takes out from it a coin purse.
Takes a smaller coin purse out of that one.*

*Takes a smaller coin purse out of that one.
Takes a smaller coin purse out of that one.
Tips it over, pours out a whole bunch of peanuts. The
peanuts fall in the most dispiriting, disenchanting spectacle
in the world.*

- That's it! That's the bonus! That's the ducats the world is scrapping over. Fighting tooth and nail over.
- Come on, haven't you heard they pay us in peanuts?
- My, my, I'm hungry.

*Scoops up a handful of peanuts from the ground, eats a few,
leaves the shells on the floor.*

- It won't bother anyone important if I leave these here, will it?

- Well, now that I'm well fed... let the show begin!

End of Play

THE PLAYWRIGHT SPEAKS: *Piccadelerium was first developed as a personal challenge to buck against traditional structure, where I wanted to pass around narrative almost like a baton. Forever inspired by commedia and circus lore, the setting and characters imbued almost naturally into the script, even in their fantastic, quizzical natures. With all the pandemonium of the high-performance world, I recognize the challenge we face as audience members to recall the humanity on the other side of the curtain, the struggles someone bears beneath the skin of their costume. Whether in the performing arts or in another industry, we cast judgements on our cohort in petty jabs and futile attempts to get ahead. To "get ahead" to where? It is my belief that work is brilliant and precious, as long as no one can take it from you. In truth it can be a lot like putting your nose to the grindstone if the stone is an unswept floor and the nose is a big red clown nose. In whole Piccadelerium is a play of workplace abuse, and yet, simultaneously, a play of spectacular foppery. Enjoy the show.*

AUTHOR BIO: Hailing from the Appalachian South, Bella Lawrence is presently based in Seattle, WA, where she studies foremost, and instigates chaos second-most, always innocuous yet contained. In 2019, she received the Broadway World Best Supporting Actress in a Professional Play Award (SC). In 2020, her 10-minute-play EYES FOR EYES premiered at Centre Stage's (SC) Original Works Festival.

In her work, Lawrence seeks to enliven the beauty and grief that comes from the plight of humanity, often simultaneously, hand in hand with nuance, deliberation, and tenderness.