

The Naked Truth

John McDonnell





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THE NAKED TRUTH

By John McDonnell

CAST

BOB: A typical suburban man in his late 50s. Somewhat excitable.

ED PICASSO: An artist in his 40s or 50s. He is attire is flamboyant in an artistic style.

Place

A small urban art gallery.

Time

Afternoon. The present.

THE NAKED TRUTH

At rise: A deserted art gallery in the city, late afternoon. An artist named Ed is admiring his paintings when Bob stumbles in the door.

BOB: *(disoriented)* Where am I?

ED: Isn't that obvious? You're at an art show. These are my latest works.

(Bob blinks and stares wide-eyed at the wall)

BOB: My God!

ED: You're shocked, I can tell. It's my in-your-face treatment of the whole man woman thing, the life and death thing, the existential thing. That's the raw truth you're looking at! You've never seen anything like these paintings, have you?

BOB: I can't see!

ED: What do you mean you can't see?

BOB: I was in the car with my wife, and I told her I wanted to get out. I got out of the car, and I decided to come in here. As soon as I opened the door, I went blind!

ED: What? That's impossible.

BOB: It's true. I don't know what happened. I can't see a thing.

ED: Is that so?

(Ed makes a silly face, but Bob doesn't react. Then he shrugs and realizes it's true.)

BOB: Everything just went dark. I read something about this once. I think it's called hysterical blindness.

ED: Really? Are you hysterical? What are you hysterical about?

BOB: I'm not hysterical about anything.

ED: Well you must be, if you got hysterical blindness.

BOB: No, I'm not. I'm a very un-hysterical person, dammit!

ED: Come on, you must be hysterical about something. Otherwise, you'd be able to see.

BOB: No, I can't think of anything that would cause this. I don't get upset about many things. I try to avoid conflict in my life.

ED: Not me. I get upset all the time. So many things get me upset, I should probably be blind as a bat right now.

BOB: Oh? What gets you upset? By the way, my name's Bob.

ED: Oh, hi Bob. I'm Picasso. Ed Picasso. Not related to the other guy.

BOB: Interesting.

ED: His work was a little superficial, don't you think? All those squiggly lines and noses going the wrong way. Weird, isn't it? I don't know where he found his models, that's for sure.

BOB: Right. So I take it you get upset a lot?

ED: Oh, sure. All the time. Like, I'm standing here and I'm boiling, I'm just livid! You probably wouldn't notice it, because on the outside I appear calm. Inside, I'm all molten lava. Nobody can see that, though. Well, especially you—you can't see it.

BOB: That's true. But when you lose your sight, your hearing gets better. I detect a faint undercurrent of rage.

ED: Oh, you're good! It IS an undercurrent, for sure. Just pure, unadulterated rage. It's amazing you can hear it. It must be true about your hearing getting better when you go blind.

BOB: So what are you so angry about?

ED: Me? Oh, everything.

BOB: Everything?

ED: Yep. It's the injustice of existence! The way an artist, for example, can work for years—decades! Without any recognition whatsoever, even though he's doing amazing work. Yeah, anger fuels my art. You can see it in my paintings, right? *(pause)* Uh, never mind.

BOB: I think things are pretty good in the world, generally speaking. I'm not one to complain.

ED: See, that's where you're wrong. Here you are, just going along minding your own business, and you get struck down in the prime of your life.

BOB: Well, I'm not actually in the prime of my life. I'm 55.

ED: Just listen to my point, will you? You're walking along, minding your own business, and you get body-slammed with hysterical blindness. I mean, where's the justice in that? You didn't do anything to deserve that.

BOB: No, I guess not. Well, I don't know, maybe I did do something. We all have our dark secrets.

ED: You did something to deserve blindness? It would have to be something pretty bad. So bad that—

BOB: Maybe I did, maybe I didn't.

ED: Like what? What did you do to deserve that kind of punishment?

BOB: I don't want to talk about it.

ED: Come on, I won't tell anybody. Listen, I'll let you in on a secret: there's nobody here. I don't get a lot of traffic at my shows. People just can't take all the truth I'm dishing out. So, okay, what could you possibly have done to deserve blindness?

BOB: I told my wife she was—I can't say the word.

ED: What word? Come on, it can't be that bad.

BOB: It's too horrible. I can't say it.

ED: Look, do what I do. If a word bothers you, just substitute a synonym. You know, like instead of saying, "liar," you say, "prevaricator."

BOB: I see. Well, I told my wife she was (*pause*) abundant.

ED: You said WHAT? (*looks around, lowers voice*) You said what?

BOB: I know, it's horrifying, isn't it? What a despicable word: (*pause*) "abundant."

ED: It's worse than that. It's, it's (*pause*) well, I mean, just from one guy to another—what was going through your mind, to tell her she was (*pause*) you know, the "A" word?

BOB: Something just snapped. I mean, do you know how many thousands of times I had to say, "No, you don't look abundant in those pants, honey?" It must have been ten thousand times. Maybe fifty thousand! And how did I phrase it? "Absolutely not, honey, you must be joking! You don't look abundant—no, no, you look positively, uh, (*searches for a word*) MEAGER in those pants!" But that didn't always work! No, words failed me sometimes. She'd look at me and say, "You're lying! I can see it in your eyes. You're just humoring me!" And no matter what I said at that point, she didn't believe me. Sometimes I just couldn't find the right answer. The stress was unbelievable!

ED: "Meager" didn't go over, huh? I would think that one would work. Maybe you should have tried "insufficient."

BOB: It wouldn't have worked. Have you ever been married?

ED: I'm married to my Art.

BOB: There are times when words fail you.

ED: You're probably right. So, tell me, how did you end up saying a word like "abundant"?

BOB: I don't know, everything went blurry. All those years of having to deny the evidence of my eyes. I mean, she's not morbidly abundant, you understand. Just—how do I put it? Generous. Really, really generous.

ED: Generous. No, that wouldn't go over well either.

BOB: Right. Men like generous, but women don't.

ED: "Parsimonious" might have worked. Maybe even "restrained." Not "generous," though. So what happened next?

BOB: Well, it all just got to be too much, and today I snapped. We were driving along, and something just went haywire, and all of a sudden I said, "Abundant? Yes! Those pants definitely make you look abundant! Not only that, you look magnanimous in those pants! You look capacious, bountiful, PLUMP in those pants!" (*shrugs*) Once I got started, things sort of spiraled out of control.

ED: Jesus.

BOB: I couldn't help myself.

ED: I know, but, Jesus.

BOB: (*shrugs*) Jesus wasn't there. I was on my own.

ED: Well, how did she react?

BOB: It was like being at a heavy metal concert, only inside a car. I think I have some hearing loss. I left, it was the best thing to do. I had to calm my nerves. I got out of the car, I came in here, and bam! That's when I went blind.

END OF FREEVIEW

You'll want to read and perform this show!