

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.

ED: Yep, sounds like hysterical blindness to me. You know what I think? I think it's a reaction to the plunge into darkness of modern man. I addressed this recently in an artwork I titled—

BOB: No, I think it's a short circuit in my brain. My eyes were saying one thing and my brain was saying another. I mean, it's been going on for years. Not just about the pants. My whole life was a lie—like, every summer we'd be walking on the beach, and some 20 year old hottie with—

ED: (*wincing, hands over ears*) Metaphor! Use a metaphor! Or at least a simile!

BOB: Oh right! A body like a really good mathematical proof, where everything fits together perfectly, or like a vision of the sun coming up over the majestic peaks of the Rocky Mountains, or like the endless rolling motion of the ocean when—

ED: Okay, got it!

BOB: I'd have to pretend I didn't see all that. It was crazy! Or, if I did notice I'd have to make some snarky comment about the young woman's body, just to maintain the illusion that I wasn't looking at her.

ED: So your eyes just shut down. They couldn't take it anymore.

BOB: Exactly. It's divine retribution. I'm being punished for my lying ways. My body just said, "Enough!"

ED: It's a hell of a thing.

BOB: I know.

ED: It really steams me how we have to lie.

BOB: I know.

ED: I mean, we're men, we're visual creatures, right?

BOB: Right.

ED: We notice everything! We have eyes in the back of our heads, when someone attractive walks by. We're built that way. But then we have to lie about it, deny the evidence of our senses!

BOB: It's a shame.

ED: It's an injustice! It's absurd and wrong and criminal! It's horrible! It's unspeakable!

BOB: (*shrugs*) You do what you have to do.

ED: I hate it! I hate that things are that way! It makes me so angry I could spit! Doesn't it make you angry?

BOB: Jesus, no, I'm not angry. I just wish I could see again. I'll tell you one thing: if I ever get my sight back, I'm going to make the most of it. I'm going to tell my wife the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth of what I'm seeing right at that moment. No more lying.

ED: It's wrong, that's what it is! Wrong, wrong, wrong!

BOB: *(blinks)* Oh my god, it's a miracle!

ED: What?

BOB: I can see! I can see again!

ED: That's amazing! What happened?

BOB: I don't know, as soon as I said, "I'm going to tell my wife the truth," there was a flash of light, and I could see.

ED: It must mean you're not hysterical anymore.

BOB: I guess so.

ED: So, now that you can see again, what do you think of my paintings? Don't they just smack you in the face with all that truth? What do you think?

BOB: *(Looks around)*. They're, uh, interesting. Oh, no! *(blinks)*. I'm blind again!

ED: Again? What happened this time?

BOB: It's because I lied about your paintings!

ED: You did?

BOB: I was being polite, but I really don't like them at all. *(blinks)* Oh, thank God, I can see again!

ED: You don't like my paintings? But you haven't seen them all!

BOB: I've seen enough. They're awful, really bad. I think you should switch fields. Working in three dimensions is obviously not your strength.

ED: Wow, you don't believe in sugar coating things do you?

BOB: Not anymore. I'm a changed man. Listen, it was nice talking to you. I'm going to go back and tell my wife she's beautiful.

ED: Beautiful? But I thought you said she looked, you know, the “A” word?

BOB: Yes, she does. But that doesn’t change the fact that she’s beautiful, and I love every curve she has. See, I’m in love with the real her, not an artificial ideal of beauty. I should have told her that before.

ED: You expect her to believe that?

BOB: Why not? I’m speaking the truth now, buddy. I don’t want to go blind again!

ED: Okay, it’s your funeral. Well, it was nice seeing you. Even though you don’t like my art.

BOB: No hard feelings, I’m just into the truth now, that’s all. And your painting—well, if you really want my honest opinion, I think it’s a complete load of—

ED: *(puts his hands over his ears)* Thank you! I don’t need to hear any more.

BOB: Don’t worry, I’m sure somebody will buy one of your paintings. Hey, maybe you could try selling them outside, like those guys who sell the paintings at gas stations.

ED: Enough with the truth!

BOB: Okay, see you!

ED: Yes, see you!

(Bob exits saying, “I can see! I can see! I’m a changed man!”)

ED: I think I liked him better when he was blind.

THE END