

DOUGLAS

By

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DOUGLAS

Cast of Characters

HARRY - A taxidermist

CHERYL - Harry's wife

Note: I see the characters as being in their late 40s. However, they may be played by actors of any age who have passed the peak of looking ahead.

DOUGLAS

HARRY and CHERYL face the audience. They are in their 40's.

HARRY

How do you lose an elephant? That's what I want to know. She said,

CHERYL

Please, Harry. Not another day of this. I can't bear it. Let it go.

HARRY

(intensely)

How...do you lose...an elephant?

CHERYL

I had to go to the ladies' room. What was I supposed to do? Bring him in with me?

HARRY

I put my life into that elephant. He was the greatest achievement in the history of taxidermy. Every muscle ... he looked like he was aching to move. Wire, pipe, and polyurethane sculpted like marble. He made the cover of the New York Museum of Natural History magazine. He was going to tour China. An inspiration. Grand as any opera. Grander. You could take your children.

CHERYL

His eyes look real,

HARRY

--I remember her saying.

CHERYL

His eyes look so terribly real.

(beat)

"Douglas"

HARRY

She called him.

(to her)

Douglas? Why Douglas?

CHERYL

I don't know. He looks like a Douglas. Those soulful eyes.

HARRY

Huh. Douglas.

(to audience)

She lost him. On the loading dock.

HARRY (CONT'D)

West of 12th Avenue at 28th Street. He was going to have his own freight car. And you wonder, did somebody think he was something else? I mean, you couldn't tell from outside the box. But if anyone received ... that box. The recipient .. you'd think when they opened the box... I mean, with all the publicity ... the t.v. news ... the FBI. You'd think they'd say, "Hey, this isn't the, what, the John Deere Threshing Machine I ordered. It's an elephant. I bet this is that same missing elephant everyone's been talking about."

(pause)

It's possible he didn't disappear accidentally. It could have been a gang. The FBI thought it was a gang, a conspiracy. That didn't want an elephant touring China. For a variety of socio-political reasons. But I don't think so.

(pause)

Hemingway's first wife ... Hadley? ... lost a trunkful of his work at a train station. The only copies. My college English professor called it the greatest act of passive aggression in the history of mankind. But losing an elephant would take passive aggression to so grand a level that it wouldn't be passive anymore.

(pause)

I can't imagine ... I don't understand ... that she would want to lose him.

CHERYL

His eyes look real,

HARRY

She said.

CHERYL

His eyes look so terribly real.

HARRY

You know how warm that feeling is ... when someone you love loves your work? That you've poured your heart and soul into. When they get right to the core of it.

(pause)

One person - a complete stranger -- can come into your life and change it forever. It can be an accident. Completely unplanned. So fragile.

CHERYL

And I wonder . . . who would have taken him? Did they know? Was I followed? Was it one man? There was a man ... I saw him on the platform. He had ruddy skin and high cheek bones and very short black hair.

(MORE)

CHERYL(cont'd)

He was wearing a buttoned leather jacket that hung well below his waist and he put a cigarette in his mouth and then lit it very quickly, his arms raised the lighter in a swift, violent motion, and as he lowered his arms and puffed the first puff, he looked at me with dark brown eyes and I looked away. He looked like a man who would have understood Douglas. Who would have taken him, just for the sheer cruelty of it, the sheer power of the cruelty. He'd sell Douglas ... to some twenty-seven year old stock broker ... who'd turn him into a petty joke in his gargantuan Kings Point rec room. I keep thinking that the man on the platform knew. It was the way he stared right at me - my heart jumped for a moment. Then again, perhaps he caught me staring at him.

(pause)

I loved Douglas. At first, the whole idea of him seemed freakish. Morbid. But as the months progressed, and he began to take shape, as he became clearer to me ... Sometimes, late at night, I'd wake up and put on my slippers and there he'd be in the studio. There he'd always be. I grew to love the smell of that studio -- the tanning solutions, the epoxy, the wax, the air brush paint, the polyurethane - everything that had gone into Douglas remained in the air, crisp and tart, like my father's aftershave. And through it all, I could smell the hide, Douglas' hide, rich and deep and musky. And I'd sit on the floor and look into those soulful eyes. Those eyes that said, "I live. I am not preserved, I am forever moving toward you, I live." He was a miracle. It frightened me, how real he was,

HARRY

She said.

CHERYL

Sometimes I felt I'd known him through several lifetimes. His huge foot raised, suspended in air above me.

(Beat)

But then, I'd only seen his breed in captivity.

HARRY

She said.

A suspended moment.

BLACKOUT.

END OF PLAY