

Listening, Feeling

A short play

Written by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

GREGORY KENDRICK

A very successful business man
in his early thirties.

DARLEEN NIXON

A blind woman in her late
twenties.

Scene: A small art gallery. The walls are filled
with abstract art and a few benches are
placed to allow patrons to sit and view the
paintings.

Time: The present.

At Rise: The lights come up and the gallery is empty.

DARLEEN (off)

I can find it, Andre, thanks.

(DARLEEN enters carrying a large canvas bag. She uses her cane to guide her way into the gallery room. She finds the bench, places her bag down, and crosses to one of the paintings and touches the frame.)

DARLEEN

Hello, again, Charles. I bet you thought I'd never come back, especially after yesterday. To tell you the truth, I didn't think I'd be back myself. It's been a long time since we've had a chance to be together.

(DARLEEN crosses back to the bench and sits down. She opens her bag and takes out a sandwich.)

DARLEEN

Ham and cheese on rye. My favorite. (pause) Your favorite. I always did try and do things like you.

(As DARLEEN takes a bite from her sandwich, GREGORY enters and slowly starts to move around the gallery, pausing at each painting.)

DARLEEN

I suppose I...

(DARLEEN stops, sensing GREGORY.)

GREGORY

Pardon me?

DARLEEN

Nothing. I'm sorry.

(GREGORY quickly crosses to a painting.)

DARLEEN

Is that your favorite?

(GREGORY turns to DARLEEN.)

GREGORY

Are you talking to me?

DARLEEN

Yes. You moved so quickly to that painting, I thought it must be the one you've been looking for.

GREGORY

Well, I'm not sure. I am a fan of Raslan and whenever he has a show going on, I come and take a look. Whenever you plan on spending a lot of money on a work of art, you want it to be the right choice.

DARLEEN

Maybe I can help.

GREGORY

Do you work here?

DARLEEN

Oh, no, not at all.

GREGORY

Then how can you help?

DARLEEN

I'm very familiar with Raslan's work.

GREGORY

I see. Most of his work appeals to me, it's just a matter of finding the right one.

DARLEEN

Well, tell me what draws you to that painting.

GREGORY

I'm not so sure I can do that.

DARLEEN

Try.

GREGORY

I'm not that good at verbalizing what it is I like about a piece of art. I like it or I don't, it's as simple as that.

DARLEEN

It's never as simple as that. If that were the case, then you would simply buy a silly fifty dollar poster and save your money for other things. But you don't. You buy expensive art and the reasons always run deeper.

GREGORY

I wouldn't know about that. I'm not a student of art, I'm just drawn to it, that's all.

DARLEEN

Oh, I understand. If you tell me what you think, you're afraid I'll laugh. Make fun of you.

(He crosses and sits next to
DARLEEN.)

GREGORY (laughing)

You do know how to cut to the heart of things. I'm not used to explaining myself. I do what I want to do and people have to accept it. I feel like I'm being put on the spot.

DARLEEN

That's not my intention. I simply want to help you choose a painting you'll be pleased with. I grew up around art, so it's easy for me.

GREGORY

All right. (pause) You're sure you won't laugh?

DARLEEN

I promise.

(GREGORY crosses to the painting.)

GREGORY

First of all, I love the abstractness of it. I love paintings that are indefinite so that you can bring your own imagination into play. Do you know what I mean?

DARLEEN

Yes, yes I do.

GREGORY

Colors meshing with other colors to bring out some interesting emotional response.

DARLEEN

If you don't mind, I'd like to hear what you feel for that painting.

GREGORY

I'm not sure I want to say.

DARLEEN

Please.

GREGORY (reluctantly)

It makes me sad. All of his work makes me sad, but not in a bad way. There seems to be something very hidden in his work. As if he painted one painting on top of another. The one that lies underneath is the true painting, but the only way to get to it is by destroying the one on top. And the fearful thing about that is, you may scrape away the fake and find there really is nothing hidden underneath. And what a waste that would be.

DARLEEN

Yes, I suppose you're right, it would be waste.

GREGORY

Here I am going on and on, and I don't even know your name.

(Crosses to DARLEEN and holds
out his hand to shake her's.)

Gregory, Gregory Kendrick.

(She makes no move to shake
his hand.)

DARLEEN

Darleen Nixon. Very nice to meet you, Gregory.

(He pulls back his hand.)

GREGORY (nervously)

I suppose I should be heading back to the office. It is
getting late.

(GREGORY crosses toward the
door to exit.)

DARLEEN

Does it frighten you?

GREGORY

What?

DARLEEN

My blindness.

GREGORY

No, it doesn't frighten me, it's just that I feel so
foolish. I should have known, somehow. I'm sorry.

DARLEEN

There is nothing for you to be sorry about. If anyone should apologize, it should be me. You came into the gallery and saw me sitting here, it's only logical that you would assume that I was sighted, and not someone who couldn't even see the tip of her nose. Sometimes I think I do it just to fool people. See how long it takes for them to discover I'm blind.

GREGORY

Fun game you play at other's expense. Here, I believed you could help me, and all you were interested in was some sick game to make me look foolish.

DARLEEN

I wasn't interested in making you look foolish. I don't blame you for being mad. I'm sorry.

GREGORY

Well, why do you come here? You can't see any of the paintings, so what good does it do to just sit there?

DARLEEN (angry)

I don't just sit here. (Pause) I'm sorry. (pause) Maybe, I can't see the paintings. But I don't have to see them to appreciate them. I don't have to see beauty, I can feel it. Haven't you ever been in a beautiful natural setting, a mountain park, and closed your eyes to let the beauty of it envelop you?

GREGORY

Yes.

DARLEEN

That's what I try to do here, let the beauty envelop me. I feel the paintings. I listen to them.

GREGORY

Listen to them?

DARLEEN

Yes. I come to the galleries during my lunch hour. I sit here with my sandwich and try and get a sense of what they all must be saying. It's funny, but when a show changes, I can tell. The voices are different.

GREGORY

What do you mean, the voices?

DARLEEN

When I sit here, I feel the paintings speak to me. It's an energy I pick up, sometimes it's quiet, other times deafening. Every so often they can be frightening, like the artist was saying something that even he wasn't aware of, something deep and dark. When I sense that kind of voice, I feel as if I want to run, but I never do. I listen all the same.

GREGORY

Listening to paintings. (pause) It takes so much patience to listen to people, I can't imagine what it would take to listen to paintings hanging on a wall.

DARLEEN

Like everything else, it takes practice.

GREGORY

I suppose so. (pause) Tell me what these paintings say.

DARLEEN

I'm not sure I want to do that.

GREGORY

So, now you're afraid I'll laugh?

DARLEEN

No, no, not at all. (pause) They're the deep and dark ones. Yesterday I sat on this bench and listened and cried. I never come two days in a row, but I couldn't stay away. This artist pleads for my help, pleads for my ears more than my eyes. But I don't want to help, I don't want to listen.

GREGORY

Then don't come here, Darleen.

DARLEEN

I have to. I don't want to, but there is something very strong pulling me here. I'm sorry. Now I'm going on and on as if we were long lost friends. This is my burden, not yours.

GREGORY

Then let it go.

DARLEEN

Maybe someday I will, but right now I can't. Can you understand that?

GREGORY

No, I can't. These are just paintings, beautiful as they are, but still just paintings. I love art just as much as anyone, but I don't want it to control my life.

DARLEEN

Charles Raslan is my father. I haven't seen him in years. I don't know why, really. There seems to be this huge gulf between us and neither one of us knows how to bridge it. I write letters, he sends paintings. I speak one language, he another. He doesn't understand mine, and I, for some reason, don't understand his. The only reason he has a show here is to reply to my letters. How stupid.

GREGORY

I guess you have more at stake here than just listening to a gallery filled with nameless paintings.

DARLEEN

Yes, much more.

GREGORY

Look, Darleen, I want to apologize for over reacting. It took me by surprise. It was stupid.

DARLEEN

It wasn't stupid, but I accept your apology. I'm not used to meeting people during one of my father's shows. This town isn't very good to him. I don't think he's sold more than three paintings in the years he's been showing here.

(GREGORY laughs.)

What's so funny?

GREGORY

I'm the one who's bought all three. Like I said, I love his work.

DARLEEN

Maybe you understand him better than I do.

GREGORY

It's easier for me. I don't have the history.

DARLEEN

Yes, that does complicate matters. (pause) I suppose I should be getting back to work. My boss gets angry when I stay out too late.

GREGORY

Yes, I have to get back too.

DARLEEN

Your boss get angry?

GREGORY

I am the boss. I just stopped in to look around. I have a meeting to prepare for. (Pause) Can I walk with you?

DARLEEN

No, I rather you not.

GREGORY

I'd like to see you again.

DARLEEN

I don't know.

GREGORY

Please, we could meet here, day after tomorrow. You could help me pick out one of your father's paintings. We'll bring our lunch. What do you think?

DARLEEN

Okay, but not here. The gallery across the street. Michael's? I'll be there at noon, if that's okay with you.

GREGORY

Yes, that will be fine. I'll see you then, Darleen.

DARLEEN

Yes. Good-bye.

(GREGORY exits. DARLEEN puts her sandwich away and begins to look around the room, as if she is listening intently. She picks up her cane, gets up from the bench and crosses to one of the paintings. She touches it softly and begins to cry.)

DARLEEN

I don't know what you want of me, father. (pause) I'm sorry.

(DARLEEN exits. The room
filled with paintings stands
alone as the lights slowly
fade to blackout.)

The End