

DOC AND LEE
by
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CHARACTERS

DOC, a middle-aged man

LEE, a middle-aged man

SETTING

Two chairs set at an angle to one another; a small table in between them. A large glass is on the table for DOC.

MUSIC

Liberace's version of "Till There Was You"

["Till There Was You" From "The Music Man" - Performed by Liberace \(1964\) - YouTube](#)

NOTE

DOC and LEE do not acknowledge one another until the end of the play. When one speaks, the other is lost in a private reverie. If possible, light changes might note the change in speaker but these should be subtle.

(At rise, DOC and LEE are sitting in their chairs, looking at the audience.)

DOC

I met my wife when I was in a high-school play. This was, of course, a long time ago. The play was *Come Back, Little Sheba* by William Inge.

(Beat)

Anyone? It was well known once. A long time ago. It was made into a movie with Shirley Booth and Burt Lancaster.

Shirley Booth? She played Hazel, the lovable and nosy housekeeper from the 50s TV show.

Oh god, am I old.

(Sighs)

Sally, my wife, was in my French class. She was a quiet girl and I was a quiet boy and I was quietly in love with her. I didn't learn much French, since I spent most of the class staring at the back of her head.

Oui.

That's it for my French.

My mother said I should audition for the school play so I would become more "social." She was worried that I would be a wallflower forever.

Wallflower. That's a good one. Don't hear that much anymore.

My father didn't say anything. He never did.

So I went to the audition and there was Sally. She was sitting in the first row of the auditorium reading the script. If I was smitten with her before, I was even more smitten—smittener?—watching her read while she curled her hair in her fingers.

And when she got up to read for the lead—the Shirley Booth part—all her shyness disappeared and this teenager became a sad, frowzy housewife in front of everyone's eyes. I was thrice smitten.

(Beat)

Oh, the play is about an unhappy childless couple—Doc and Lola. Doc's an alcoholic trying to stay on the wagon and Lola had a dog named Little Sheba who took off one day and never came back. A young woman comes to live with them, Doc yearns for her, starts drinking again, and, well . . . it's not a happy situation.

I wanted to play Doc but Danny O'Brien, a handsome kid with a deep voice, got the part. Have to admit he was very good.

He's dead now. Heart attack.

I got the part of the mailman.

LEE

Well, first I had to explain to the doctor who Liberace was. Is? He was a huge star for decades, I said.

She nodded.

A pianist, but more that, an entertainer. Flamboyant. Known for his incredibly elaborate costumes. Capes, feathers, jewels. Star-spangled hot pants. On all the TV variety shows for years—Dinah Shore, Dean Martin, Carol Burnett.

Her eyes sort of glazed over.

I see, Mr. Polachnik, she said.

I don't think she did. She wanted to get to her next patient and maybe grab lunch.

I looked over at my mother, hoping she would roll her eyes or make a face, like she used to in doctor's offices, post offices, any offices.

Hoping for a sign. But she just smiled and looked at us serenely.

DOC

So, long story short, I eventually married Sally. And we settled in to our lives. No children.

We kept on in the theater. Community theater.

She was the newlywed in *Barefoot in the Park*. I was the delivery guy who huffs and puffs his way up the third-floor walk-up. She played Ophelia, I played, let's see, oh, one of the players. No lines in that one. I didn't mind. Minor parts were my specialty.

As she got older, Sally got the famous female leads—Auntie Mame, Annie Oakley, Mamma Rose—and I still got the supporting roles and character parts—butler, second cowboy, grouchy stagehand.

Auditions, rehearsals, shows—they kept us busy, and Sally seemed happy.

LEE

My mother had a fine mind. She loved crossword puzzles, words searches, Scrabble. She loved *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune*. She used to get so mad if a contestant muffed an answer.

"That woman is an idiot, Henry," she'd say.

She read the newspaper every day. And not just the obituaries. She knew current events. She was interested in the world. She commented on the goings-on in the White House and the City Council.

Every Thursday she went bowling with the girls.

She was always going to shows. She saw all the Broadway musical tours and came home singing "Younger than Springtime" and "Bushel and a Peck" and "If Ever I Would Leave You" and "Till There Was You."

And she loved going to concerts—Steve and Eydie, Tom Jones, Jack Jones, Engelbert Humperdink. The doctor didn't know any of these either.

But of all the entertainers that she loved, the one she loved the most was Liberace.

DOC

(DOC takes a sip of his drink. He sips now and then until the end of the play, getting looser but not flat-out drunk. He does not slur or shout.)

So my wife got the plum female parts—Martha in *Virginia Woolf*, Blanche in *Streetcar*, Marian in *The Music Man*—and a guy named Eddie Calpin got the male leads—George, Stanley, Harold Hill.

I stopped auditioning, stopped performing, stopped doing much besides work—and going to the corner bar.

Yes, I drank. Not as much as Sally says—or said—I do. I drink a little every day. Not that much. Not like Doc, that poor SOB. Not like Doc after he got the hots for his lodger.

(Beat)

That's what Sally called me. Doc.

LEE

Mother, I'd say, he's gay.

Oh, not my Liberace. Not my Lee. He's just . . . fancy.

I sighed. I didn't want to argue.

We'd go back to watching *Wheel of Fortune*. Then a commercial would come on and she'd say, He's so handsome . . . and funny and kind . . . and . . . exuberant.

Then she'd give me a glance, and it was her turn to sigh.

I've never been called exuberant, and neither was my disappointing father.

Dad left us a long time ago. My mother called herself a widow, even before he left.

You know, you're just jealous, she'd say before the commercials ended.

I thought of responding, but she shushed me when *Wheel* came back on, and stare intently as Vanna White unveiled the letters.

Here's That Rainy Day, she'd say, satisfied. I knew it.

DOC

Aside from that, Mrs. Lincoln, how was the play?

(Chuckles)

Always loved that joke.

Well, my wife left me for Eddie. And guess what, he's our mailman.

Yeah, mailman by day, Harold Hill by night. Stanley Kowalski delivers my mail. Through rain or sleet or whatever.

Every day Eddie gives me my bills.

Bills and Chinese restaurant flyers and Publisher's Clearinghouse announcements. You may already be a loser.

(Drinks, chuckles)

LEE

Then, little by little, she stopped solving the puzzles.

She'd sit silent for a long time in front of the TV, the look on her face would be . . . blank. Every now and then she would smile.

I took her to the doctor.
Your mother will only get worse, the doctor said.
She was a bit of a sour puss, as my mother would have said.
Sometimes, I said to the doctor, she thinks I'm Liberace.
That's when I explained who Liberace was.
Ah, the doctor said. Hmmm.

DOC

Sally was a lovely Marian the Librarian.

(Sings)

There were bells on a hill
But I never heard them ringing

(Sips)

Wonder whatever happened to Doc? You know, after the play ended.
Probably drank himself to death.

Three cheers for Doc.

(Beat)

Little Sheba never came back.
Maybe run over by a truck.
That'll teach her.
Or maybe she found another family. Better family.
Don't come back, Little Sheba. Don't ever come back.

LEE

(Alternating between Liberace and his mother)

It's Lee, Mrs. Polachnik.
Oh, Lee. You're so formal. Call me Dorothy.
Dorothy. How are you, Dorothy?
Okay, Lee. I'm here.

And I'm here.

(Beat)

You know, my son Henry thinks you're a fairy but he's an idiot like his father.

Oh, Dorothy. You're a pistol!

He's such a disappointment.

Aren't you being too hard on him, Dorothy? He takes care of you.

He does, he does. He's a good boy.

He tried, he tries.

(LEE tries not to cry)

Yes, he does. I'm sorry. I have a mean streak, Lee. I got it from my mother.

(Beat)

Lee, do you remember that show at the Allentown Fair in the summer of 1972? I was in the third row with my girlfriends. Remember?

Oh, yes, yes, I remember.

I was wearing a yellow dress. I thought I looked fat.

You looked fabulous.

Thank you. You did too.

Of course. Always.

(Beat)

You're my favorite fan, Dorothy.

Oh, Lee. I love you, Lee.

And I love you, Dorothy.

(Smiles)

(Liberace's version of "Till There Was You" begins to play. DOC and LEE exchange glances. DOC stares and drinks, LEE smiles. As lights slowly fade, music plays briefly but long enough for audience to recognize the song.)

End of Play