

The Elephant on Sixth Street: An American Parable

John Morton

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A fun cat-and-mouse caper discusses American temptations through witty dialogue and a clever plot.

Fast-paced and funny, John Morton's *The Elephant on Sixth Street* is a classic caper wrapped around a social commentary on the temptations that lead us away from those we love. Set in urban Texas, the tale pulls us along on a series of adventures that seem to always make life worse for the troubled, but upbeat, protagonist.

Jack lives a complicated life. With a loving wife and young baby at home in Austin, he works as a speechwriter for corporate executives by day while trying to make it as a stand-up comic at night. Behind the scenes, he frequents illicit massage parlors and enjoys less savory pursuits. This double life eventually catches up to him when hidden cameras capture his liaisons with Meg, whom he visits regularly at a VIP club in Dallas.

When Meg steals an iPad containing the steamy videos from her boss, she and Jack find themselves on the run from a shady cast of characters intent on using the files to blackmail the club's high-profile clients. While Jack tries desperately to avoid further complications, he finds himself stumbling deeper into a web of deceit and betrayal.

The formatting of the book is unconventional for a novel and often feels more like a screenplay, with dialogue preceded by the speaker's name and short, almost abrupt sections of narration. The story is compelling and enjoyable, though with sparsely populated pages, it feels underdeveloped and more like an excerpt of a larger book than a complete stand-alone novel. That said, the text is well written, with sharp, witty dialogue that makes the pages fly. The author's ability to create compelling characters and an intriguing plot will leave many wanting more as the story comes to an early conclusion.

The subtitle, "An American Parable," suggests a deeper commentary on the state of modern society, and the book certainly paints a negative portrait of the hidden lives people lead when they believe they're not being watched. While none of Jack's secret activities are frowned upon specifically, the author makes it clear that all the excitement and pleasure he may find cannot compare to the love and support he receives at home. This reflection is subtle, though, and never feels like an overt message; it is instead hidden carefully behind an entertaining cat-and-mouse game that often borders on the surreal.

Despite going against many standard conventions for the genre and style, *The Elephant on Sixth Street* is enjoyable and highly readable. It will appeal to readers looking for a light and fun caper full of fast action and genuine laughs.

ERIC ANDERSON (October 16, 2014)

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