

Banter of Two

You haven't been listening to me.

Then repeat yourself for me.

I'm not doing it for you. It's for me that I'm doing it. That's the part you don't understand.

Then repeat that part for me.

You haven't been listening.

You just said that. There. I was listening.

That doesn't prove anything.

Who said it would? Maybe your problem is that you listen so well you hear what you want to instead of what I say.

Do you think that's a fair criticism?

Is that a rhetorical question for you?

Is that?

Maybe we ought to start at the beginning. You said I wasn't listening.

Don't patronize me.

How was I patronizing you?

You suggest we start again and then demonstrate how well you listen by reminding me I said you never do. You don't see any patronizing in that behavior?

I prefer to call it cooperation.

Call it whatever you like.

Okay.

Smugness.

How am I smug?

By agreeing to call it whatever you like, as if I were seriously extending that option. That's another example of how you don't listen to me.

Or how you hear what you want to.

So you disagree now? That's a good start. Why don't you commit to the real issue that strongly.

Is it a question of commitment?

Yes, listening is a form of commitment. Of course it is. That's probably why you avoid it.

Avoid what?

Very funny.

How is that funny? What do I avoid?

Listening.

Of course. I must not have heard you. Maybe you can summarize the highlights so far.

You're an arrogant ass.

I heard that.

Congratulations.

Are they in order? I would think regret is the likelier reaction.

Who said anything about reactions? That's another example of how you claim my thoughts for yourself.

Can you elaborate for me?

I can elaborate, but for myself.

Does that help you?

Only if you'll listen to me do it.

I'm listening now.

So that's it? Now I have to talk because you're ready? Don't you see how insulting that is?

Is that what you wanted to say?

More or less.

More or less?

Always both.

That part I don't understand.

I wonder if you can.

I wondered that too.

No, I wondered that.

So I didn't. That's what you want to hear. Am I right?

You can't perform for me and expect that to be enough. You have to mean what you say.

You can't mean what you say and expect that to be enough. You have to perform for me.

Exactly.

You agree?

I do.

Does that mean I've been listening?

It does.

Is it my turn to speak then?

It is.

I can never tell if you mean what you say.

Is that right?

I want to believe you, but you don't believe yourself.

How do you know that?

It's obvious.

How?

No one who wants agreement so badly ever believes they can accomplish it through sincerity. Instead, they adopt a flexibility that requires total spinelessness.

So I'm spineless?

But you listen well.

I remind you not to patronize me.

What difference if I do? Is it the end of all human interaction if I patronize you occasionally?

No, it's the end of our human interaction.

That's a high price. However, it follows naturally from the feeling of rejection you experience during disagreements.

I wish I knew myself as well as you know me.

I wish I knew myself as well as you know me.

You don't think you're claiming my thought when you repeat it like that?

Perhaps I am.

Perhaps I have a problem with agreement.

Perhaps you do.

It's never been easy for me. When I was a girl, my mother told me my father was always right, but I disagreed with the way he treated her.

How did he treat her?

He beat her and bossed her around.

What did you do?

What could I do? I went to school and tried to have friends and stay away from the house on weekends. No one minded my absence that I could see.

Didn't you?

I guess I wasn't someone I could see at that point.

What do you mean?

I mean I didn't take care of myself.

Your needs went unattended.

Entirely.

Did you do anything about that?

How do you mean?

What did you do to express yourself? You weren't happy.

I don't remember. I think nothing.

Maybe you can't remember because you didn't listen to yourself expressing your unhappiness.

I didn't listen to myself?

That's why it seems like no one else will, is my guess.

You aren't patronizing me?

No.

Because that would be the limit.

Consider it distant.

Like you often are.

Why shift the attention to me?

Because you always questions like that.

I do?

How can you not know that about yourself? That's how distant you are: you deny you exist.

I think we're talking about you again.

Are you claiming my idea?

Are you claiming mine?

It's impossible to say. But that doesn't change the fact that you vanish like smoke.

I like that image.

Do you? Maybe it's true then.

Or poetic.

Don't patronize me.

Quite the contrary.

Don't flatter me, either.

What can I do then? You seem to prefer me when I vanish. You never listen to me anyway.

You can't mean that.

But I do.

But I said it first about you.

But it wasn't true.

What makes you say that?

I was listening.

As was I. But all I ever hear is an echo.

That's poetic too.

Yes it is.

Thank you for accepting that remark.

You're welcome.

I don't feel welcome.

I'm not surprised.

Neither am I.

Why not?

I haven't felt welcome in ages.

How have you felt?

Unwanted mostly. Like nothing about me is worth attention it would require to appreciate.

Do you require a lot of attention?

I wouldn't know.

Is that because you never give yourself any?

Who's stealing ideas now?

I prefer to think of it as an indication of why we talk to each other at all: our similarity. Without that, we wouldn't last more than a minute.

Not even a minute. You're right. But people don't like to admit that, do they?

Only to their friends.

But they're similar to them.

Exactly.

Meaning what?

That you wouldn't tell anyone else.

You wouldn't have time.

True, but no inclination is the real reason.

It certainly comes first.

That's an excellent way to put it.

That's kind of you to say.

Perhaps it is.

Isn't it?

I think so.

Then so do I?

But what if I didn't?

Then you probably wouldn't have said it.

Not in that tone anyway.

Say it in a different tone.

Are you crazy?

Is that how people tell?

Very funny.

Thank you.

You missed my tone.

Wasn't it sarcasm?

Yes.

So was mine.

You're very stubborn.

We are alike.